

**SEEKING ‘THE FOREIGN STAMP’:  
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE  
(RE)PRODUCTION OF CLASS STATUS IN  
MUMBAI, INDIA**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of  
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## **DECLARATION**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

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December 2018



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## ABSTRACT

International education is an increasingly popular life choice for young, urban Indians. Academic scholarship has shown growing interest in where, how and why Indians study overseas. However, many of these studies overlook the role that class status plays in shaping how students from India imagine and experience international education and its outcomes as they transition into adulthood. Studies of India's middle classes, on the other hand, have tended to omit the importance of transnational mobility in producing class status. This thesis therefore explores the complex relationships between how international education is imagined and experienced, and how class status is (re)produced in Mumbai, India. Using data gathered from 80 in-depth interviews in Mumbai in which participants discussed their perceptions of international education, its value and its outcomes, I argue that there are significant nuances in how the value of international education is perceived, embodied and made distinct within the granular class hierarchies that constitute the urban upper-middle class and elite. I focus on prospective and returned students situated at 'home', which provides a unique perspective given international student mobility literature's tendency to focus on the experiences of existing students. Using Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) theory of class reproduction as a starting point, I discuss how various forms of capital – especially cosmopolitan cultural capital (Igarashi & Saito, 2014) – are accumulated both prior to and during international education, and how capital informs experiences of return to India.

Specifically, I argue that there are two distinct imaginaries and experiences of international education in the Mumbai context which correspond to the localised class identity of the individual seeking international education. On one hand, the South Bombay or 'SoBo' elite seek to maintain their existing privilege by engaging with international education in order to acquire 'the stamp' of having spent time overseas, which 'finishes' them as young adults and poises them as 'ready' to engage in adult life in the same elite context in India in which they were raised. On the other hand, 'suburban strivers' engage with international education with a desire to seek upward mobility but they do not seek to mimic the lifestyles or behaviours of the SoBo elite. Rather, suburban strivers pursue a transformative experience that promises to change the trajectories of their lives, especially in relation to career options but also in terms of their lived experiences. These divergent approaches to engaging with international education permeate the way that individuals imagine and experience international education, impacting their mobility trajectories, career aspirations and decisions about when and who to marry. Ultimately, this thesis highlights the importance of examining class in relation to international student mobilities, and transnational mobility in relation to the study of class in India, especially in relation to the urban upper-middle class and elite.





## **PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS THESIS**

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## **CONFERENCE PAPERS**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In mid-2017, as I was in the early stages of drafting this thesis, a *BuzzFeed India* ‘privilege checklist’ was circulated by several of my Indian friends on social media. Under the heading ‘How Privileged Are You?’ sat 127 checkboxes geared toward highlighting one’s advantages within Indian society, including:

- ☐ I can read, write and speak English fluently.
- ☐ My parents paid for my education.
- ☐ My friends or family connections helped me access professional networks.
- ☐ I was oblivious to the caste system as a child.
- ☐ I have studied abroad.

My friends posted their results to their social media feeds: 91 of 127, 112 of 127, 100 of 127. These friends, like most of the participants in this study, are among India’s more privileged citizens. Although this ‘privilege checklist’ was ostensibly designed to garner ‘clicks’ and ‘likes’, rather than uncover the nuances of how class status is produced, when reading through the list I was surprised by how closely it resonated with my own research findings. Unlike much of the academic scholarship on class in India, *BuzzFeed*’s checkboxes (perhaps inadvertently) highlight the granularity of class identities in India. Does someone who scores 80 belong to the same group as someone scoring 110? What about individuals scoring 90 and 100? Where do class boundaries lie? How are they made? And why are they significant?

*BuzzFeed India*’s privilege checklist also illuminates the importance of studying abroad in the making of privilege, and how it works in mutually constitutive ways with wealth, connections, education, and the right styles of speech, dress and bodily comportment. These factors all enable an individual to engage with international education – such as being fluent in English and having parents who are able to pay for education. However, as the data presented in this thesis will demonstrate, lines of distinction are not always drawn solely along who can access what form of education, but also *how* they engage with it and how individuals differently embody various forms of privilege. Drawing on 80 in-depth interviews conducted with participants in Mumbai, in

this thesis I argue that there are two distinct imaginaries and experiences of international education in the Mumbai context, which correspond to what I call ‘localised micro-categories of class’.

On one hand, the South Bombay<sup>1</sup> or ‘SoBo’ elite seek to maintain their existing privilege by engaging with international education in order to acquire ‘the stamp’ of having spent time overseas, which ‘finishes’ them as young adults and poises them as ‘ready’ to engage in adult life in the same elite context in India in which they were raised. On the other hand, ‘suburban strivers’ engage with international education with a mind to seek upward mobility. They do not seek to mimic the lifestyles or behaviours of the SoBo elite. Rather, suburban strivers are pursuing a transformative experience that promises to change the trajectories of their lives, especially in relation to career options but also in terms of their lifestyles. These divergent approaches to engaging with international education permeate the way that individuals imagine and experience international education, impacting their mobility, career and marriage trajectories. This thesis examines how these imaginaries and experiences relate to place-based identities with Mumbai as the ‘sending city’, which will highlight the importance of considering local urban geographies in research on international students.

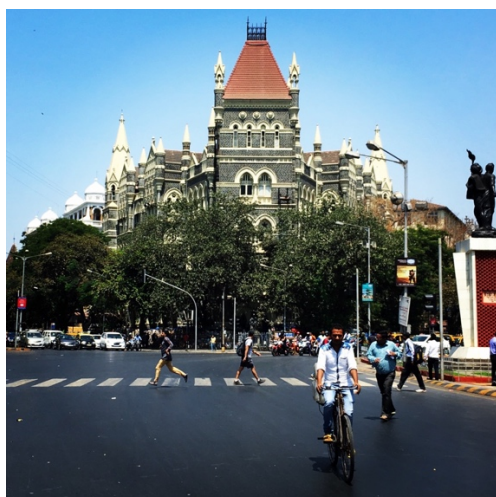
This dichotomy between suburban strivers and SoBo elites is evident not just in relation to international education, but is also part of the daily fibre of life in Mumbai. *Mumbaikars* consistently distinguish between the suburbs and ‘town’, constructing different ideas about how each area functions as a space within the city, as well as different ideas about the people who live in each area. Mumbai is the most populous city in India, home to approximately 22 million people, and is one of the mostly densely populated cities in the world (Perera, 2017). There are stark differences between various areas of the city, which correspond to the assumed class status of people who reside in each area. Participants imagined South Mumbai as the centre of high culture and old money, whereas the suburban areas of Mumbai were considered to be less ‘sophisticated’ in terms of residents and the quality of infrastructure. There is certainly an aesthetic

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<sup>1</sup> Participants often referred to Mumbai by its former name, Bombay. Mumbai locals use the terms interchangeably, though it seemed that using Bombay rather than Mumbai indicated one’s sense of ownership and belonging to the city (e.g. when I travelled to other regions of India, most Indians used Mumbai and not Bombay).

difference between South Mumbai and the suburbs. South Mumbai features ornate Gothic and Victorian architecture, including most of the city's major tourist attractions, and is home to many art galleries, museums, theatres, designer boutiques, as well as the Bombay Stock Exchange financial hub. Here, one is likely to see glittering diamonds on the hands of fashionable women whilst they midweek-luncheon, pausing to instruct their drivers to collect their children from elite schools before transporting them to afterschool extracurricular activities.

**Images of Mumbai (L-R, clockwise): Gothic architecture typical of South Mumbai, the trendy and youthful inner suburbs, and the newly-built outer suburbs (photographed by the researcher)**



Conversely, the suburbs feel somewhat more utilitarian in style, with newly constructed high rises and multiple forms of public transport that ferry millions of workers to their offices each day. The suburbs can feel like a concrete jungle – the streets are well-

planned, but they are repetitive, often poorly maintained and lack the architectural charm of South Mumbai. The suburbs have become a popular base for young professional migrants from other parts of India to share a room with several others, or for struggling Bollywood actors trying to make it in ‘The City of Dreams’. In the suburbs one also notices more noise pollution and dust in the air; crossing the border into South Mumbai, where no rickshaws are able to travel, can indeed be a relief to the senses. Whilst conducting fieldwork, I was living in the suburbs and while my now-husband lived in ‘town’. Participants from South Mumbai would often quip that this qualified as a long-distance relationship. For many in Mumbai this sense of distance between the south and the suburbs is a lived reality. ‘Townies’ are often reluctant to travel to the suburbs because bad traffic makes the 20km trip arduous, and catching the overcrowded local train is out of the question for many (if not most) of the SoBo elite.

My own experience of living in Mumbai for four years – and counting – reiterates that the town/suburbs dichotomy is significant. I lived in the suburbs for three years before moving to South Mumbai after I married into an Indian family, so I now have friends from both sides of the metaphorical tracks. Although most of the ‘SoBos’ that I had met prior to moving to South Mumbai were participants in the study, I felt that I had a good idea of what life in South Mumbai would be like, but it was a far more jarring transition than I had anticipated. My friends from the suburbs, some of whom I have known for almost a decade, are generally from families with a moderate amount of wealth. They all own their apartments, they have cars, many attended private schools, they are employed in predominantly well-paid professional jobs, they like going to bars and eating at restaurants, and most of them travel internationally once every year or two. My friends from the suburbs certainly live elite lifestyles in the context of India, however, they do so on a budget. Eating at a fancy restaurant is a special occasion, when they travel they stay at backpacker’s hostels, and they drive Indian-made cars. Their lifestyles have limits (Gilbertson, 2017a).

This is in stark contrast to my friends from South Mumbai. On the surface, ‘townies’ have and do many of the same things as my suburban friends: they own houses and cars, they attended private schools, they frequent restaurants and bars, and so on. However, the spaces that they access and what they do within these spaces is very, very

different. Their apartments are usually very large – some even live in bungalow houses – and they drive foreign-made luxury cars. They regularly eat at expensive restaurants and many *only* wear luxury labels. For women, a designer handbag is compulsory. They travel overseas several times per year where they stay in five star hotels, and many of them have permanent residences in New York or London. A friend from the suburbs explained that you can tell the difference between her and a ‘SoBo type’ because she books her international travel months in advance, whereas they book the week before they travel – a fair comparison in my experience. Further, all of my South Mumbai friends, without exception, are employed in their family’s business or run their own offshoot of the family business, and have a large amount of inherited wealth. They have all also studied overseas, usually in the USA, and always employed the help of a high-end education counsellor to ensure their entry into the best possible university abroad. This all suggests that the production of class is a *material* project as well as a *cultural* one (Liechty, 2003).

Recently, when driving back from the gym in someone’s Mercedes, I listened with fascination as two of my South Mumbai friends tried to out-do one another with anecdotes of who had committed the most ‘obnoxious’ plagiarism while they were attending university in America. Both had been caught and reprimanded by the university on multiple occasions, but had been allowed to remain enrolled and receive their degrees. It struck me that for these friends, international education was not a particularly serious endeavour, but was instead a time to ‘have fun’ before they returned to India to join the family business. This is reflected in Chapter Eight in particular, in which some women from South Mumbai families seek international education as a period of freedom prior to marriage. On the other hand, only a few of my friends from the suburbs had studied abroad, and those who had would never dream of risking the money that their parents had invested in their education because they would rather go clubbing than complete an assignment. They simply had too much riding on the successful completion of their degree and subsequent employment, ideally overseas (this is discussed in Chapters Six and Seven). For my suburban friends, returning to India is not part of their desired mobility trajectories. As one friend said to me before he left for Australia, “once I get there, I’m never coming back.” It is these contrasts between the ‘SoBo elite’ and ‘suburban striver’ class groups and their divergent relationships to international education that I unpack in this thesis.

## SITUATING CLASS

When I started this research project, one of the key factors that I sought to understand was how participants employ the notion of class and situate themselves within Mumbai's class hierarchies, which yielded murky results. This was not necessarily surprising; scholarly literature has highlighted that 'middle-class' has a variety of meanings in the Indian context (Fernandes, 2006, 2015; Donner & De Neve, 2011; Baud, 2015; Dickey, 2016; van Wessel, 2004; De Neve, 2011; Murphy, 2011; Forsberg, 2017; Brosius, 2010; see also Liechty, 2003). For instance, Fernandes and Heller (2006) argue that the Indian middle class consists of at least three fractions with varying levels of power and dominance. These include: the 'new middle class', characterised as a diverse group with professional credentials who hold well-paid corporate jobs that neoliberalism has facilitated; the *petit bourgeoisie*; and educated workers who occupy salaried clerical, administrative and teaching roles. Despite this blurriness around middle-class identities in India, it became increasingly clear as my study progressed that those who seek international education from Mumbai are not truly 'middle class' in that they (do not) belong to the middle socio-economic strata of society.

The nominal per capita income in India is US\$1820 (World Bank, 2018), sitting uncomfortably close to the poverty line. For this reason, most wealth-based definitions of India's middle class do not include those literally in the middle, but rather those whose wealth allows for a more recognisably middle-class lifestyle. A number of publications have attempted to define the income or wealth boundaries of India's middle class along these lines, with disparate results (see also Shukla, 2010; Meyer & Birdsall, 2012). For example, a McKinsey Global Institute (2007) report used National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) data to estimate that households with an annual disposable income of Rs. 200,000–1 million (US\$2,900–14,600) qualified as middle class. In 2015, a Credit Suisse report used the IMF's purchasing power parity (PPP) to define the entry threshold to India's middle class as an adult who owns US\$13,700 in assets. If we compare either of these figures to the average cost of a master's degree in the USA, which is approximately US\$20,000–35,000 plus living expenses (see also Thomas, 2017), then it casts doubt on whether a family whose income fits within these definitions of middle class would possess disposable income that would allow them to afford international education. It should be noted that education loans are a big business in India, which might



help more middle-class people access international education (Thomas, 2017; Robertson, 2015; Rutten & Verstappen, 2014; Walton-Roberts, 2015b). Nevertheless, it seems likely that the majority of Indian students who venture abroad belong to families whose wealth is in excess of most definitions of India's middle class.

Scholars have observed that measures of economic wealth do not accurately reflect class hierarchies in India (see, for example Mazzarella, 2005; Krishnan & Hatekar, 2017; Fernandes, 2015). Many scholars have recognised that Indian people ranging from the poor to the rich define themselves as 'middle class' and have tried to understand what being middle-class means to those who identify as such (Bétielle, 2001; Donner & De Neve, 2011; van Wessel, 2004; Dickey, 2016; Brosius, 2010; Donner, 2016; Jeffrey, 2010; Säävälä, 2003). For scholars, a key question is therefore how the concept of class allows people to articulate (imagined) identities and how these identities relate to power, position and privilege (Mazzarella, 2005; Upadhyaya, 2016a). As Liechty (2003) observed in Nepal, "middle-class membership is not about fixing rank but about *claiming* and *maintaining* a place in an ongoing debate" (115, emphasis in original). In this sense, class is not about 'real' socio-cultural groupings, but is rather about collective recognition of an identity with specific characteristics that are more-or-less agreed upon.

A central finding within the literature is that Indian 'middleclassness' is often founded on practices of distancing oneself from those below and/or above, typically in moralised terms (Nisbett, 2007; Srivastava, 2007, 2009; Dickey, 2013, 2016; Gilbertson, 2017a; see also Liechty, 2003). As Chapter Four details further, almost all participants in this study stated that they belong to Mumbai's upper-middle class and deployed similar moralised distancing discourses. For these reasons, I engage with literature on India's middle class throughout this thesis. As this introduction has already begun to demonstrate, however, SoBo elite participants typically live without a (strict) budget and would be considered elite in any context – not just in a low-to-middle income country such as India. For this reason, I label this group as elite. On the other hand, the lifestyles of the suburban strivers and the ways that they engage with international education are more consistent with a global middle class. Their self-chosen label of upper-middle-class is therefore deployed throughout this thesis.

I do not, however, see the boundary between the elite and upper-middle class as absolute. On the contrary, there is a great deal of overlap in terms of access to capital that each group possesses, such as being able to afford international education. The boundary between these groups is blurry and is constantly being negotiated as each group tries to assert the greater legitimacy of the cultural capital that they possess. A key contribution of this thesis, then, is to illustrate the ambiguity of this boundary between the upper-middle-class and elite, and to show how this boundary is negotiated by those who inhabit it. A general note on how I talk about class in this thesis: I see both the SoBo elite and suburban strivers as belonging to India's 'relative elite' overall, and when I drill down into the capital-based distinctions between these groups I argue that suburban strivers are upper-middle class and SoBo elites are elite.

Arising from the challenge of how best to approach class in this thesis, I develop the notion of 'localised micro-categories of class'. Local geographies, which are the foundation of the SoBo elite and suburban striver groups, appear to impact an individual's aspirations, trajectories and experiences as they complete their education and transition into conventional adulthood marked by steady employment and marriage. These local geographies also correlate with other dimensions of class including level of wealth and source of income, i.e. family business or salaried professional (discussed further in Chapter Four). I refer to these distinctions of class status within Mumbai's upper-middle classes as 'localised micro-categories of class' because they are closely tied to local urban geographies, and operate as sub-categories within participants' broader understanding of their class position. As such, I understand these categories as significant social constructs, rather than absolute empirical realities.

These localised micro-categories of class are the foundation of a key contribution that this thesis makes to knowledge about international education and the reproduction of class status in urban India. There are two key interrelated gaps in the extant scholarly literature that this thesis seeks to address (both of which are discussed in detail in the next chapter). First, much of the literature that considers international student mobilities recognises that students belong to a 'global middle class', but does not interrogate what impact class status has on producing mobility or how it impacts individual experiences, aspirations, trajectories, and so forth, in relation to international student mobility. Second,

much of the literature on class in India omits the significant role that transnational mobility plays in (re)producing status, of which student mobility is one example.

There is some extant literature that does consider transnational mobility and class in relation to India, primarily focused on IT professionals (Radhakrishnan, 2011; Upadhyay, 2016a). This research has provided important insights, which are discussed at various points throughout this thesis. However, transnationally mobile IT professionals are often held up as representatives of India's mushrooming middle class(es)<sup>2</sup>, which speaks to one of the fundamental issues within literature on class in India. 'Middle-class' is used to describe a vast array of socio-economic positions within India, such as well-paid and well-educated IT professionals who are more likely to belong to the upper-middle class or elite. Dickey (2012: 565) reinforces this concern, stating that "we need to re-imagine different ways of learning about class, which class contours are most relevant in specific communities, and what consequences for everyday lives are involved in the emergence of new class formations." This study makes a contribution towards closing this gap by focusing on young people positioned in Mumbai's upper-middle class and elite.

There is an obvious scholarly silence around India's upper-middle class and elite. Growing bodies of literature address the lower-middle class's complex relationship with education (Jeffrey, 2010; Deuchar, 2014; Brown, Scrase & Ganguly-Scrase, 2017; Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery, 2005), as well as the ways in which the middle class distinguish themselves from the elite or the poor (Gilbertson, 2017a; Dickey, 2016; Brosius, 2010; Donner & De Neve, 2011; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2008). However, we know almost nothing about how the upper-middle class and elite distinguish themselves from class others and thus how the boundaries of middleclassness are negotiated at the upper end. This is a crucial piece of the puzzle that must be understood in order to have a more complete picture of how social reproduction operates within India. As Khan (2011) argues, contemporary embodiments of privilege are less visible than they have previously been because privilege is nowadays founded in notions of merit, ease, skill and capacity.

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<sup>2</sup> This is true of scholarly literature as well as the media. For examples of the latter, see Ninan, 2014; Gowen, 2013. Radhakrishnan (2009, 2011) also examines the media's portrayal of female IT workers.

This is especially true of the SoBo elite participants in this study, who engage with international education with ease and comfort – unlike the suburban strivers, who tend to have a less smooth experience (discussed further in Parts One and Two) – and use this as a basis for judging the ‘merit’ of the strivers. This thesis demonstrates that the ‘same’ international education experience can have very different meanings for different class groups. It is not just access to international education that facilitates the reproduction of social inequalities, it is also nuances of the experience itself.

## **INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY AND CLASS**

At the centre of this thesis are questions about how transnational mobility and class status are intertwined. Mobility is a term that carries multiple meanings: one can be physically mobile, socially mobile, economically mobile. Mobility can be upward, downward or horizontal, it can transcend borders and boundaries. It can also highlight one’s socio-economic and/or geographic fixity, despite or in spite of mobility. Mobility can be the desirable end-result of one’s endeavours, or it can represent the point of departure from which other goals are pursued and realised. Mobility is, however, “a resource to which not everyone has an equal relationship” (Skeggs, 2004: 49). The relationship between class status and mobility is therefore central to (re)producing inequality both across and within socio-economic strata. That is, an individual’s (in)ability to be(come) mobile reflects and reinforces one’s power in relation to others.

I employ the term ‘mobility’ rather than ‘migration’ because the former emphasises the movement involved in migration, rather than privileging sending and/or receiving countries (King & Raghuram, 2013). ‘Mobility’ also draws attention to the fact that the movement of students is not linear in the way that the term ‘migration’ often implies. Many authors have demonstrated the multiple movements of international students, whether towards permanency in the host country (Robertson, 2013; Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Findlay, 2011; Hazen & Alberts, 2006), back home (Lulle & Buzinska, 2017; Holloway, O’Hara & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012), or onwards to another destination/s (Geddie, 2013; Musumba, Jin & Mjelde, 2011; Baas, 2010; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Further, using the term ‘mobility’ also highlights that there are aspirations caught-up in the movement of young people that extend beyond migration from A to B, such as self-actualisation and career goals (Tran, 2016).

Transnational mobility is a central component of contemporary youth aspiration in the Global South. The number of international students worldwide has expanded exponentially in recent decades, nearly quadrupling from 1.3 million in 1990 to 5 million in 2014 (ICEF Monitor, 2015a). Within this global increase of international student mobility, students originating from Asia continue to be one of the most mobile groups of young people. In 2017, almost 300,000 students left India for foreign institutions, second only to China who sent a staggering almost-900,000 students abroad (UNESCO, 2017). As the number of young people who move internationally continues to expand, the role that mobility plays in the lived and imagined lifecourses of young people comes into purview, as does the role of industries that facilitate their movement. In urban India, like many other Asian metropolises, mobility often occurs across transnational borders as young people seek educational, professional and lifestyle opportunities and experiences overseas.<sup>3</sup> However, international student mobility is generally only possible for those who have access to money and information. One's class status is thus crucial to becoming a mobile student.

Although class status is crucial to becoming a transnationally mobile student, scholars typically position international students as belonging to a global middle class (see Thomas, 2017; Sancho, 2015; Baas, 2016; Martin, 2018). Conceptualising international students as homogenously belonging to the 'middle class' disguises vast and often uneven differences between students from a single country and – as this thesis demonstrates – from a single city. Localised and heterogeneous manifestations of class status are under-explored in relation to how they impact international student mobility (for an exception, see Luthra & Platt, 2016), which this thesis seeks to address.

This relationship between class position and access to prestigious forms of education is not a new one. Education has long been a key marker of status in India, especially for the middle classes and the elite.<sup>4</sup> Scholars often cite Lord Macaulay's *Minute on Education*, presented to parliament in 1835, as the moment in which the British

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<sup>3</sup> There is also significant movement of youths from rural to urban areas for work and study, though in India this group tends to be less affluent than those who pursue international education. See, for example Brown et al., 2017; Deuchar, 2014, forthcoming; Smith & Gergan, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> For more detailed accounts of India's class history, see, for example Chatterjee, 1989; Fernandes, 2006; Lobo & Shah, 2015; Varma, 1998; Misra, 1961.

colonial rulers' intention to create an educated Indian middle class became clear.<sup>5</sup> In Macaulay's own words: "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." Subsequently, the British implemented English-language education and opened schools and universities to disseminate "Western, modern knowledge" to the Indian elite, and later to the wider 'native' population (Seth, 2007: 1).

Also as a result of colonial rule, Indian students (predominantly Hindus from Calcutta and Bombay) started arriving in Britain in small numbers during the 1840s. By the interwar period, the number of Indian students had grown substantially to as much as 1,800 in 1927 (Lahiri, 2000: 5). The British occupation of India and corresponding educational opportunities produced a small 'ruling class' of 'natives' that typically consisted of the English-speaking educated upper castes, who were usually employed in government departments (Raijada, 2015; Varma, 1998). Some of those who joined the Indian Civil Service under the British Raj had been educated in India, but most had attended schools in the UK, to the extent that between 1853-1922 examinations to join the Civil Service were only open to those who had studied in Britain (Lahiri, 2000). As Lambert-Hurley (2016) argues, there was significant prestige associated with qualifications awarded in Britain during and after the colonial rule.

The next major wave of Indian international student mobility occurred after significant economic reforms during the 1990s facilitated increasing wealth, especially in the urban centres (Oxfam India, 2018). This is the wave that we still see today. Marking the end of Indian socialism, which had dominated political ideology throughout the post-colonial period, in 1991 the Indian government began liberalising the economy. The hallmarks of India's economic liberalisation were expanded foreign and private investment, deregulated markets and reduced taxes, which have been heralded for bringing about significant economic growth and prosperity (Fernandes, 2006; Heeks,

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of the short and long term impacts of Macaulay's Minute, see Evans, 2002.

1996). The sudden expansion of the Indian middle classes is credited to these economic policies.

Recent decades have seen rapid growth, privatisation and participation in the secondary and tertiary education sectors in India (Jeffrey, 2008, 2010; Gilbertson, 2014b; Sancho, 2015, 2016). In just five years, participation in tertiary education in India doubled from 14 million people in 2007 to 28 million in 2013 (ICEF Monitor, 2016). An Indian middle-class desire to accumulate capital via educational credentials is demonstrated in many studies, which find that education is both a maker and marker of distinction (for example, see Sancho, 2015; Jeffrey, 2010; Gilbertson, 2017a; Vijayakumar, 2013; Gopinath, 2015). However, the quality of the Indian tertiary education system has been criticised for its emphasis on rote learning, outdated curricula, and a shortage of qualified faculty (ICEF Monitor, 2015b), a point which was echoed by participants in this study and cited as a reason to seek international education.

Recently, there has been an unprecedented number of Indian students travelling overseas for degree studies (Baas 2010; Gopinath 2015; Rutten & Verstappen 2014). As of July 2018, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs estimated that there were 753,000 Indians studying abroad, primarily in Anglophone countries. The popularity of outbound international student mobility from India reflects the rise of the (upper-)middle classes and their increasing wealth, which has allowed more families to purchase international education for their children and has seen a concurrent expansion of the international education industry. However, participants explained a growing concern that as more people obtain foreign degrees they may lose value in the job market. As Thomas (2017: 1879) similarly notes, international education has become a “critical site of contention as larger numbers of young people seek education credentials that will make them more competitive in the current global economy.” Questions around the role of class status are therefore increasingly crucial if we are to understand how international education is a ‘site of contention’ for international students from the Global South.

There has been growing interest in the experiences that international students have when they are overseas, especially in relation to their interactions with the state (Robertson, 2013, 2015, 2017; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014), the university (Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2015; Marlina, 2009; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010) and the public

domain of the host country (Baas, 2009, 2014; Bonazzo & Wong, 2007; Brown & Jones, 2013; Marginson et al., 2010). However, despite the well-honed academic notion that education and social reproduction are interlinked (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), we know relatively little about the class status of international students and how this impacts their imaginaries, experiences and trajectories pertaining to international education. This gap in knowledge is problematic for two key reasons. First, mobility and cosmopolitanism within education systems has often been treated as an inherent positive, without recognition that mobility is linked to class systems. This means that inequalities within international educational mobilities are often overlooked (for exception, see Leung & Waters, 2013; Waters & Leung, 2012, 2013b). As Gilbertson (2016) argues, unequal access to elite forms of education – such as international education – allows the already-privileged to legitimise their various forms of capital and thereby reproduce their status. Second, there has been a tendency to treat students from particular nations as a homogenous group, but attending to class granularities reveals that international students from the same country can have very different expectations and experiences. This may impact how universities and policy makers cater to international students (Tuxen & Robertson, 2018).

## THESIS OVERVIEW

The central focus of this thesis is to understand how international education functions as a key site wherein class is performed and (re)produced. I specifically seek to understand how localised micro-categories of class differently impact imaginaries and experiences of international education among Mumbai's upper-middle class and elite. A central finding of thesis is that, for SoBo elites, pursuing international education is *presupposed* – as a rite of passage and as a 'stamp' of their socio-economic status. For suburban strivers, on the other hand, international education is typically experienced as *aspirational*. Their transnational mobility arises from favourable circumstances, such as newly acquired familial capital or the academic ability of the child, as well as a desire to achieve upward socio-economic mobility. This thesis discusses how these different expectations, aspirations and experiences play out in the culture and place-based identities of Mumbai as the 'sending city' – as opposed to other studies of international student mobility which tend to focus on the experiences of students whilst they are overseas (for



examples of this, see Sherry et al., 2010; Gargano, 2009; Cairns, 2014; Bista, 2018; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011).

In this chapter I have introduced many of the key ideas that underpin this thesis. I have also outlined the key contributions that this thesis seeks to make to existing knowledge around class status and international education. In Chapter Two I review relevant bodies of literature pertaining to class, mobility, international education and youth in order to situate the thesis. In Chapter Three, Methods and Methodology, I detail how the study was conceptualised, designed and conducted. The empirical chapters of this thesis are organised into two parts, each of which contain two or three chapters pertaining to a stage of international student mobility. In Part One (Chapters Four, Five and Six) I focus on prospective students and their experiences, while Part Two (Chapters Seven and Eight) focuses primarily on the experiences of returned international students.

The first chapter of Part One, Chapter Four, builds on many of the ideas presented in this Introduction and Chapter Two, demonstrating that there are two dominant ‘localised micro-categories of class’ that emerge from participants’ discussions of international education. Distinctions between the SoBo elite and suburban striver categories are an element of all subsequent chapters of this thesis. In Chapter Five, I turn to the international education industry in Mumbai as a key site through which transnational student mobility is imagined and made possible. I argue that an individual’s localised micro-category of class impacts how they experience the international education industry. The SoBo elite are typically able to afford the services of education counsellors, who are assumed to be unbiased and ensure that ‘good’ decisions are made about international education. Suburban strivers, on the other hand, are more vulnerable within the international education industry because they lack inherited capital and access to networks that provide supplementary information about international education.

In the final chapter of Part One, Chapter Six, I focus on the notion of ‘exposure’ described by participants, finding that localised micro-categories of class differently shape the value that participants assign to gaining ‘exposure’. I argue that the local concept of ‘exposure’ can be understood as a form of what academics call cosmopolitan cultural capital. For suburban strivers, exposure is about attaining a better, ‘practical’ education and international workplace experience. This is expected to result in upward

socio-economic mobility, which is a central desire of the suburban strivers group. However, this chapter finds that suburban striver women often face barriers that would prevent them from becoming mobile, despite their desire to study overseas. For the SoBo elite, gaining exposure is a project of self-actualisation, which they expect will mark their prestige and privilege upon return to India. SoBo elites also mobilise the discourse of exposure to assert their superior approach to international education, denigrating suburban strivers and their upward aspirations.

In the second empirical section, I turn to the experiences of returned students, where cosmopolitan cultural capital again plays a central role to how localised micro-categories of class impact experiences pertaining to international education. Chapter Seven explores how young people differently experience returning to India according to their localised micro-category of class. Suburban strivers are assumed to remain abroad in the long-term in pursuit of better careers and livelihoods, so returning to India can be seen as a 'failure' by this group. This contrasts to the SoBo elite, who are expected to return to India in order to benefit from the cosmopolitan cultural capital that they accumulated whilst overseas. For SoBo elites, returning to India is a marker of their privilege. For SoBo women in particular, as Chapter Eight discusses, returning to India after obtaining a foreign degree often means that they enter the arranged marriage market. For these women, international education is a period of 'fun and freedom' prior to returning to their relatively fixed lifecourses. Suburban striver women, on the other hand, sometimes use international education as a way to resist the desires and expectations of their families in relation to marriage. Ultimately, in Chapter Nine, summarise the findings of this thesis and reflect on future directions for this research. I conclude by highlighting the importance of studying class in relation to international student mobility, and international student mobility in relation to class.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As the previous chapter introduced, this thesis seeks to demonstrate the importance of understanding what impact class status has on producing international student mobility, particularly how it impacts individual experiences, aspirations, and trajectories within specific local contexts. It also seeks to highlight the significant role that transnational mobility plays in (re)producing class status. In this chapter, I argue that this is an important endeavour because studies of class have not paid enough attention to student mobility, and studies of international student mobility have not paid enough attention to class. In order to situate forthcoming empirical chapters and establish a conceptual framework, in this chapter I explain my approach to key concepts – class, cosmopolitan cultural capital and (international student) mobility – in relation to my empirical analysis.

In this chapter I also highlight the original contributions of this thesis by demonstrating key gaps in the literature that I seek to address in the empirical chapters. I first discuss Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) conceptualisation of class, particularly the 'forms of capital', drawing on empirical literature pertaining to India and international student mobilities to discuss how the notion of capital relates to and is relevant to this thesis. Through this discussion I find that localised and heterogeneous manifestations of class identity in relation to India as well as international education remain under-explored. So, while I argue that a Bourdieusian lens focused on different forms of capital and how they produce distinction is indeed one of the most productive ways to understand international student mobility (see also Yang & Cheng, 2018), additional concepts are required to bolster Bourdieu's overly neat hierarchies that do not always translate to empirical contexts outside 1970s Paris (Lamont, 1992). I therefore draw on the notion of cosmopolitan cultural capital (Weenink, 2007, 2008; Igarashi & Saito, 2014; Gilbertson, 2016), which provides a useful conceptual tool to extend Bourdieu's theory of class reproduction. Cosmopolitan cultural capital also relates to the idea of 'exposure' that emerged from the data. In this section I argue that, while scholars contend that cosmopolitan cultural capital is central to the formation of middle-class identities in India, how cosmopolitan cultural capital relates to and impacts international student mobility is

relatively unknown. This thesis extends this literature by examining how relatively elite Indians – who are very much under-researched in studies of class – accumulate and deploy capital acquired via international education, particularly cosmopolitan cultural capital.

In the third and fourth sections of this chapter I turn to the concept of mobility in relation to international student mobilities, lifecourses and the emerging concept of ‘middling mobilities’. In reviewing literature pertaining to international student mobilities, I find that a binary exists in the way that Western youth mobilities are framed around ideas of self-actualisation and temporariness, while non-Western youth mobilities tend to more often be studied in relation to migration, risk and economic motivations. I seek to challenge this binary in the empirical chapters by demonstrating how localised micro-categories of class differently impact the motivations of international students from Mumbai, some of whom seek to self-actualise by studying overseas, while others reinforce the non-Western end of the binary mentioned above. In relation to lifecourses, I identify that although emergent studies suggest that student mobilities must be situated within the broader lifecourses of individuals, few studies are conducted with students before or after their international education. Additionally, in relation to ‘middling mobilities’, I find that while this concept provides a useful framework to situate class as well as student mobilities, nuanced approaches to ‘the middle’ are lacking, which I seek to address in this thesis via the ‘localised micro-categories of class’ that I develop.

Ultimately, I argue in this chapter that socio-economic locations, life trajectories and cultures of mobility must be considered *in relation to one another* as interwoven factors if we are to generate a more comprehensive understanding of international student mobilities. Furthering this argument, in the final two sections of this chapter I briefly address gender in relation to class and mobility, highlighting the importance of including gender in these understandings. Last, I review literature on the international education industry, finding that relatively little is known about how education is brokered, particularly in relation to education agents and counsellors, nor how socio-economic statuses are embedded within and shape the international education industry.

## CONCEPTUALISING CLASS

Three key theorists provide much of the foundational canon of sociological understandings of class: Marx, Weber and Bourdieu. Marx is primarily concerned with the economic, positing that class is shaped by the relationship to the means of production (Bottomore, 1991; de Brunhoff, 1976). While Marx recognised that class privilege produces a privileged ideology, he “did not appreciate how important a role the very *cultures of social privilege* played in actually producing and reproducing the material reality of economic power” (Liechty, 2003: 12, emphasis in original). A Marxist approach to studying the middle classes has proved particularly challenging for scholars, partly due to Marx’s lack of conceptual clarity around the middle class, and because Marx did not anticipate the growth of the middle classes in modern capitalist societies (Donner & De Neve, 2011; Wright, 1985, 2005; Sitton, 1996).

For Weber, *class* is a position that one occupies in the capitalist market as well as in relation to one’s ability to consume goods and services (Van Hear, 2014), while *status* is related to individual or group lifestyles, education/training, socialisation and inherited or occupational prestige (Liechty, 2003). Weber was primarily concerned with how ‘social stratification’ is produced via class (wealth), status (prestige) and party (power), especially in relation to the ‘intermediate’ or middle groups (1947; see also Giddens & Held, 1982). Weber was therefore interested in pluralism associated with class structure and how people attempt to achieve ends by using various means. However, Weber believed that class and status are distinct – though often interrelated – categories. As Liechty (2003: 14) notes, “Weber never explicitly laid out a mechanism that theorized these links between social status and class situation.” This is where Bourdieu’s approach to studying class provides a useful framework for understanding how various factors that ‘make’ class are entangled with one another, which I use as a springboard to theoretically frame this thesis.

Bourdieu’s (1984, 1986, 1990b) theory of class reproduction considers how social and cultural factors work together with the economic to (re)produce class status. For Bourdieu, everyday cultural practices, such as consumption and the cultivation of ‘taste’, are central to the production of class distinction. The crux of Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of class is a theory of practice. Class is not a category into which a person can be slotted.

Rather, class is a set of behaviours that constantly (re)produce class. Bourdieu theorised that the everyday practice of class could be explained via economic, social, cultural and symbolic forms of capital, which are accumulated, exchanged, converted and performed within the lives of individuals as well as within the spaces they inhabit. Bourdieu argued that economic capital – defined as an individual's or group's command of that which is “immediately and directly convertible into money”, such as cash and assets (1986: 243) – is the root of all other forms of capital. Without access to economic capital, it is not possible to accumulate other forms of capital.

It is not only the accumulation of ‘amounts’ of capital that denotes class status. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly in the context of this study, forms of capital are used to create distinction between classed groups and individuals. Cultural capital is a key site through which individuals and groups create distinction between themselves, how they signify belonging or membership to (sub-)groups, and how they align themselves with some and maintain distance from others. Cultural capital includes “competences, comportment, tastes, skills, identities, ideologies, and educational attainments” (Dickey, 2016: 19). Bourdieu (1986) specifies three states of cultural capital: the objectified state, defined as physical objects that hold cultural significance such as paintings and books that can be bought or inherited, as well as the knowledge of how to use and appreciate these goods. The institutionalised state, which includes formal credentials or qualifications, such as degrees, which Bourdieu characterises as “certificate[s] of cultural competence” (248). And the embodied state, which he defines as the “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (243). For example, embodied cultural capital includes an individual's tastes in music and art, dress sense and way of speaking (accent, grammar, word choice, etc.).

Cultural capital cannot be handed to another person like economic capital but must be learned over time in the environment in which an individual is situated. This dimension of cultural capital is what Bourdieu calls the *habitus*, which he defines as a ‘system of acquired dispositions’ that function on a practical level either as categories of perception and/or assessment, or as classificatory principles (1990a). Jeffrey (2010: 19) usefully describes *habitus* as the “internalized orientations to action inscribed in people's demeanor, reflexes and tastes that both reflect people's histories and shape their futures.”

Habitus acts as a mechanism of social reproduction in which an individual's deeply ingrained habits, skills, dispositions and tastes that are accumulated through their life experiences are demonstrated. The main thrust of this argument is that one's habitus establishes the possibilities and limitations that are available to an individual actor (Ortner, 2006), which reproduces social positions (Bowers-Brown, 2015).

In relation to India, scholars argue that the reproduction of class status is contingent on historical privilege, often in the form of caste, geographic location (i.e. urban or rural), and money/property (Deshpande, 2013; Vaid, 2012; Desai & Dubey, 2012). For example, Upadhyia argues that middle-class status is difficult for the 'masses' to obtain because "middle-class *habitus* derives largely from social origins such as caste identity or urban background" (2016a: 280, emphasis in original). This suggests that the historical privilege or disadvantage of caste continues to shape the habitus of individuals in the present. The complex relationship between caste and class is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Bourdieu (1986) explains that cultural capital is 'unconsciously' accumulated over time and is primarily inculcated through one's family, community and formal education. Bourdieu argues that, because of the social conditions in which cultural capital is accumulated, it is more muted than the transmission or acquisition of economic capital. Cultural capital is therefore disguised as "legitimate competence" rather than as a form of capital (1986: 245). Some performances of class, such as academic achievement or cultural refinement, therefore appear to 'come naturally' to some (higher class) individuals or groups more-so than others.

Scholars have argued that these 'natural' competencies are often read as meritocratic, allowing class advantages to be disguised, particularly in the job market. For example, Brown and Tannock (2009) observe in Western economies that the 'global war for talent' creates uneven opportunities based on levels of education, skill and talent, thereby (re)producing social, economic and educational inequalities. In India, scholars have importantly drawn attention to discourses of merit within the IT industry (Upadhyia, 2016a, Radhakrishnan, 2011). The central argument in these studies is that access to education is largely determined by class status, however, one's educational credentials are read – especially by prospective employers – in terms of merit (see also Subramanian,

2015; Gilbertson, 2016). Merit permits people to frame their success in terms of hard work, talent and effort, thereby glossing over educational inequalities derivative of class and caste status (Upadhya, 2016a). Radhakrishnan (2011) also argues that the IT industry serves as a space for ‘personal transformation’ via international travel, new experiences and jobs that are seen as based on merit rather than class or connections. However, discourses of merit embedded within the IT industry conceal pre-existing privilege, such as elite education, that allows an individual to obtain a position within the IT industry in the first place.

While the empirical work on India, class and merit has focused on job markets, it is crucial to also understand how young people seeking international education expect to convert this form of elite education into longer-term gains. In the East Asian context, Johanna Waters’ (2006b; 2009) research contributes significantly towards addressing this question. Waters (2009) finds that certain industries recognise and reward ‘overseas’ or ‘Western’ credentials, which leads to middle-class families actively seeking international qualifications. This, Waters (2006b) argues, can disadvantage locally educated graduates whose job opportunities may be hindered by growing numbers of young people with overseas qualifications. Although, as Hao, Wen and Welch (2016) discuss, home-country employment benefits may be declining for recent Australian-educated Chinese graduates, but more research is needed to investigate to what extent this might apply to the Indian context. The literature relating to Indian international students (discussed below) reveals little about how students – especially prior to departure and those who return to India – expect foreign degrees to convert to certain advantages, both in the workplace (discussed in Chapters Six and Seven) and in their personal lives (Chapters Six and Eight).

Status is also made in relation to specific groups of people. Bourdieu argued that the importance of belonging to a group or network and subsequently having access to resources is highlighted in the notion of social capital. Bourdieu (1986: 248) defines social capital as group membership that “provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital.” Groups are established through mutual recognition of the group and policing of group membership. Importantly, as Bourdieu (1986) argues, the ‘volume’ of social capital that one possesses hinges on the size of one’s network and the ability of that network to access and mobilise various forms of capital. Essentially, who



you know can impact the opportunities that you can access. In the empirical context of this study, groups through which social capital is conferred could include alumni networks of elite schools, wherein belonging to one of these groups bestows members with access to information about international education from highly mobile people as well as business or professional opportunities.

The way that capital is differently valued and accessed by insiders and outsiders also denotes levels of ‘taste’, through which class distinction is (re)produced. Bourdieu (1984) argues that *only* positively valued capital is deemed ‘legitimate’ by dominant members of a given society, who therefore determine what constitutes ‘high culture’ and ‘low culture’. In Bourdieu’s (1984: 97) words, “Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects ... distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.” Banal everyday tastes are therefore not arbitrary but are based on power and social status. A person’s tastes are simultaneously a reflection of their own social status and a judgement that they make about the status of those who do or do not share their tastes. Johnston and Baumann (2007: 197) explain that “the dominant classes affirm their high social status through consumption of cultural forms consecrated by institutions with cultural authority.” The higher classes define and therefore control what constitutes ‘legitimate’ cultural capital, such as ‘good taste’ and authoritative knowledge, which results in the reproduction of class inequality without direct, coercive social control (Gilbertson, 2017a; see also Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Studies of India’s middle classes are replete with examples of how class groups are (apparently) defined by shared tastes, particularly in relation to consumption practices (van Wessel, 2004; Osella & Osella, 1999, 2000; Nisbett, 2007; Jaffrelot & van der Veer, 2008; Gilbertson, 2014b) and the domestic sphere (Säävälä, 2003; Dickey, 2000). In Madurai, for instance, Dickey (2000) argues that paid domestic workers from the lower-classes are seen by their middle-class employers as a potential danger to the sanctity of the household because they do not share the same tastes and manners, which is believed to create a situation in which the employer’s children could pick up ‘bad habits’ by spending too much time with lower-class domestic workers. In relation to consumption,

a desire for and ability to afford Western or foreign goods is associated with middle-class ‘good taste’ (Osella & Osella, 1999; Parameswaran, 2004). In her study of Mumbai’s ‘new’ middle class, Christiane Brosius (2010) finds that lifestyles have shifted to incorporate new taste-related practices, such as domestic and international travel, gym cultures, children’s entertainment and Westernised fashion (see also Gilbertson, 2014b on class and fashion in Hyderabad).

Discourses of taste also extend to educational choices, wherein India’s middle class families seek to equip their children with credentials and forms of social and cultural capital that will allow them to pursue employment in the global economy (Sancho, 2015; Rizvi, 2014; Gilbertson, 2016, 2017a). As Rao (2010: 170) contends, “education ... can be considered as a ‘product’ that helps cultivate particular lifestyles, tastes and dispositions that contribute to distinction.” For example, international schools are viewed by the middle class as a site wherein young people can become ‘global minded’ (Gilbertson, 2017a; Sancho, 2015; Forsberg, 2017), which is seen as an indication of possessing good taste. In Mumbai, Brosius (2010) finds that acquiring educational credentials in fields such as business administration are crucial for middle-class people seeking to gain a foothold in the corporate and service sectors. However, educational credentials “often [do] not produce upward mobility” because the new middle class frequently lack “broader requirements” – such as proficiency in global standard English and “taste, style, and manners” – that constitute the social capital deemed necessary for access to the new middle class (Brosius, 2010: 99; see also Jeffrey, 2010). Academic scholarship reveals a great deal about how India’s middle classes seek to acquire and demonstrate ‘good taste’, however, we know almost nothing about practices of taste in India’s elite. If, as I discussed above, we accept that the elite define and control what constitutes ‘legitimate’ cultural capital (i.e. good taste), then understanding the habits and desires of this group is crucial in order to gain a more complete picture of how class functions in India, as well as further insight into the origins of the desires of the middle class.

According to Bourdieu, class is not made simply by accumulating various forms of capital. In order for social and cultural capital to ‘work’ they must be recognised as having value, which is typically achieved through the conversion of social or cultural

capital to symbolic capital (Lawler, 2011). Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as “the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (1989: 17). Symbolic capital is therefore closely tied to honour and prestige. In the empirical context of this study, the value ascribed to international education for the SoBo elite is mostly symbolic. Having spent time overseas as an international student brands the SoBo elite as ‘the right sort of person’ who has accumulated the ‘right’ sort of experiences. For suburban strivers, on the other hand, the honour and prestige of spending time overseas is less important than obtaining an educational qualification that is directly convertible to a good job, for example. However, this is not to suggest that suburban strivers do not also value the symbolic capital that can result from international education – in fact, they partly rely on this in order to get a good job if they return to India. The difference is that SoBo elites appear to value prestige above all other potential gains from international education because they already possess the gains that suburban strivers seek to make – wealth, secure income, and so forth.

Bourdieu (1986) believed that all forms of capital derive, to some extent, from each other but they are never reducible to any other. This approach means that class status is always dynamic and changeable, never static or stable. Although economic capital is the root of other forms of capital, there is not necessarily a direct correlation between the amount of economic capital that an individual has access to and the amount of social, cultural or symbolic capital that they have accumulated. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 99) explain that various forms of capital can be unevenly distributed: “two individuals endowed with an equivalent overall capital can differ ... in that one holds a lot of economic capital and little cultural capital while the other has little economic capital and large cultural assets.” The notion that capital can be unevenly distributed is reflected in the ‘old’ and ‘new’ Indian middle class(es). The ‘old’ Indian middle classes have been characterised as “a Nehruvian civil service-oriented salariat” who nowadays are not necessarily financially well-off, but who have long-term networks of institutional connections (Mazzarella, 2005: 1). That is, high on cultural capital but low on economic capital. This compares to the ‘new’ middle classes, who are a contested group (Fernandes, 2006), but are generally agreed to possess higher levels of economic capital than the ‘old’ middle class. The ‘new’ middle classes are seen use their newly acquired economic capital for mass consumption (Fernandes, 2006; Krishnan & Hatekar, 2017), sometimes

to the distaste of others (Mazzarella, 2005), which demonstrates this group's relatively lower levels of cultural capital. Participants in this study do not necessarily neatly map onto this dichotomy put forward by other scholars, perhaps because they are generally more elite than the middle-class people Mazzarella (2005), Fernandes (2006) and others refer to. However, the notion of 'old' and 'new' class groups is reflected in the old money and old status of the SoBo elites and the relatively new money of the suburban strivers (discussed further in Chapter Four).

In this study I contribute to discussion about various class groups in India and their accumulation of forms of capital by focusing on the upper-middle class and elite. I demonstrate that capital is differently accumulated between localised micro-categories of class, namely that the SoBo elite possess high economic as well as high cultural capital, while suburban strivers possess lower amounts of both economic and cultural capital in relation to the SoBo elite. This is a novel approach in relation to other international education studies in that I address how locally founded conceptions of class impact on transnational mobility. By focusing on capital that participants associate with international education – beyond the fact that economic capital equates to access to international education – this thesis demonstrates how factors other than money, such as cosmopolitan cultural capital, can also shape expectations and experiences.

Bourdieu's framework allows me to consider how forms of capital that individuals accumulate or have access to colour their experiences in relation to international education. In this thesis I am primarily interested in how different forms of capital (re)produce class status in relation to international education, namely by means of access to and pre-existing knowledge about international education, assets and money, networks, as well as tastes, prestige, and discourses of merit. Here, I find that Carol Upadhy's (2016a: 24) theoretical conception of class in the Indian context aligns with Bourdieu's paradigm. She argues that class is not "just as an 'objective' system of structured inequalities" but is rather:

...a subjectively meaningful social category that carries multiple cultural adhesions. Classes are structured by the differential distribution of assets, capital, and property ... but they are also continually under construction – created, reproduced, and altered through social and symbolic as well as material practices.

Upadhyia highlights two key points that I draw upon in my analysis. First, that class can be subjectively meaningful, and that self-definitions are therefore important. Second, that class is something that is *made* on an everyday basis via sociocultural practices. In Nepal, Mark Liechty (2003: 4) similarly finds that “class culture is always a work-in-progress, a perpetual social construction that is as fundamentally bound to the ‘concrete’ economic resources as it is to the cultural practices of people who jointly negotiate their social identities.” It is this interplay between access to economic resources and the cultivation of particular aspirations and expectations pertaining to international education that I unpack throughout this thesis.

While Bourdieu’s framework is instrumental in theorising how class is made and reproduced, it is not without limitations. Namely, Bourdieu (1984, 1987) theorised an overly neat hierarchy of high-to-low culture that mapped onto high-to-low social class. I concur with many researchers who have since contested these unilinear hierarchies, arguing that this may have been true of 1970s Paris but it does not translate to other contexts (Warde, Martens & Olsen, 1999; Lamont, 1992; Erickson, 1996; Emmison, 2003; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2010; Igarashi & Saito, 2014). Bourdieu was also concerned with capital acquired at home and rewarded in the education system (Gilbertson, 2016; Kim, 2011), whereas this thesis demonstrates that capital is accumulated both inside and outside the home and is recompensed in spheres including but not limited to education systems. So, while I take from Bourdieu the importance of multiple forms of capital, the idea that class is something that is made through everyday distinctions and tastes, and the notion that how one acquired one’s capital is significant, his hierarchies cannot account for the nuanced and largely horizontal differences between the SoBo elites and suburban strivers in this study. I therefore extend Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction, borrowing from work on cosmopolitanism, specifically cosmopolitan cultural capital.

## **COSMOPOLITAN CULTURAL CAPITAL**

Cosmopolitanism has emerged in the last 25 years as a descriptor of the contemporary urban condition (Beck, 2006; Calhoun, 2008), as well as a conceptual framing for making sense of “cultural difference and experiences that occur through migration, mobility and a range of other lifestyle and consumer practices” (Horst, 2015: 620). Across a broad range of studies, cosmopolitanism is most often associated with an

orientation and openness to foreign people and cultures – as those who are ‘at home in the world’ (Hannerz, 1996; Brennan, 1997; Calhoun, 2003).<sup>6</sup> In recent years, scholars have turned to Bourdieu’s notion of social reproduction to theorise cosmopolitanism as a new form of cultural capital (Weiss, 2005; Weenink, 2007, 2008; Kim, 2011; Igarashi & Saito, 2014; Gilbertson, 2016). This discussion has seen the emergence of the notion of ‘cosmopolitan cultural capital’, which I adopt in this study as a useful tool that extends a Bourdieusian approach to exploring how participants imagine, ascribe and derive value from international education. In this section I first explore existing literature on cosmopolitan cultural capital in relation to education before then turning to the Indian notion of ‘exposure’, which I conceptualise as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital.

I follow Don Weenink (2008: 1092) in defining cosmopolitan cultural capital as the “bodily and mental predispositions and competencies” that allow individuals to “engage confidently” in globalising social arenas. That is, cosmopolitan cultural capital is the embodiment of particular skills and behaviours that are recognised and associated with ‘legitimate’ knowledge and ‘tastes’ pertaining to global arenas. In his study of ‘internationalised streams’ in Dutch secondary schools, Weenink (2007, 2008) explains that people accumulate, deploy and display cosmopolitan cultural capital in a number of circumstances which involve travelling abroad, interacting with foreign cultures, people, or products (such as media), and possessing a “near-native mastery of English and at least one other language” (2008: 1092). Weenink (2008) also explains that global hierarchies exist in which cosmopolitan cultural capital acquired in the West is imagined as most valuable and that Other foreign contexts are less – or not – desirable. This is reflected in the current study, and by international education trends in general, wherein a majority of international students from non-Western countries pursue their tertiary studies in the English-speaking West (for statistics, see UNESCO, 2017). However, because transnational mobility is a prerequisite, only the relatively privileged are able to accumulate cosmopolitan cultural capital.

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<sup>6</sup> I acknowledge, however, that cosmopolitanism is a contested term. It has been defined in a number of different ways, ranging from people and localities, economic and political relationships, morality and community, and so forth. For more detailed discussions of cosmopolitanism, for example see Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Calhoun, 2003, 2008; Beck & Sznaider, 2006; Beck, 2006; Beck & Grande, 2012.

While other scholars have considered the idea of cosmopolitan cultural capital in relation to high schools (Weenink, 2007, 2008; Horst, 2015) and tertiary education (Kim, 2011; also see Rizvi, 2005), Igarashi and Saito (2014) were the first to develop a comprehensive Bourdieusian framework that locates cosmopolitan cultural capital as part of an analysis of social reproduction. Following Bourdieu's observations around social reproduction within education systems<sup>7</sup>, Igarashi and Saito (2014) argue that education systems are a key source of the production and legitimisation of cosmopolitan cultural capital. They contend that education systems "operate as central institutional mechanisms that legitimate cosmopolitanism as a desirable attribute of the person living in a global world, while distributing this universally desirable attribute unequally within a population" (2014: 223). The unequal distribution of cosmopolitan cultural capital results from the fact that different class groups – who have accumulated varying levels of cultural, social and economic capital – will accordingly pursue different educational trajectories that offer varying volumes of cosmopolitanism.

In India, Amanda Gilbertson (2016) argues that cosmopolitan cultural capital is central to the legitimisation of certain forms of capital that Hyderabad's upper-middle class and elite have privileged access to via the education that they are able to afford, which is often mistaken for merit or talent. This, Gilbertson (2016) argues, disadvantages students who have not attended elite schools because their lack of cosmopolitanism is read as a deficit of merit rather than a result of socio-economic inequalities. David Sancho's (2013, 2015) research in urban Kerala similarly finds that middle-class families aspire to send their children to elite schools in the hope that they will acquire forms of capital, linked to 'global mindedness', that will ensure the child's success in the private sector job market.

The pursuit of cosmopolitan cultural capital has likewise been demonstrated in relation to international education, particularly among students from Asia pursuing tertiary education in the English-speaking West (Soong, Stahl & Shan, 2018; Waters,

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<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that children exposed 'highbrow' culture at home are advantaged in schools and that teachers recognise and reward this advantage, thus excluding other children who lack similar cultural capital. 'Working class' or minority pupils are thereby subjected to a form of 'symbolic violence' that forces them into a competitive mechanism that rewards only dominant forms of cultural capital.

2005, 2006a; Kim, 2011, 2016; Sancho, 2017; Tran, 2016<sup>8</sup>). For example, among South Korean PhD students in the US, Kim (2011, 2016) finds that studying in America presents an opportunity for students to enact their ‘preferred lifestyle’ and develop both a cosmopolitan worldview and a large network of foreign contacts. Kim (2011) notes that, because of the cost of international education, these cosmopolitan and educational aspirations are restricted to those who are already relatively elite in Korea – defined by having well-educated parents with secure wealth. Kim (2011: 120-121) explains this further:

they want to become both professionals and world citizens who can communicate and compete with foreigners, fulfilling their desires to be cosmopolitan elites. ... the US degree is pursued in order to gain privileged positions, within which Korean students expect to use their cosmopolitan attitude and lifestyle as the means of demarcation and access to exclusive cultural resources that others cannot easily enjoy.

This, Kim (2011) argues, allows already-elite students to reproduce their class status, primarily by returning to Korea to secure well-paid, sought-after jobs.

From an educational perspective, Rizvi (2005) examines the experiences of Chinese and Indian students in Australia, asking how experiences of mobility as well as formal learning can shift students’ perceptions of their identity, their own cultures and emergent global cultures. Rizvi (2005) finds that students arrive in Australian universities with a ‘global cosmopolitan imaginary’ already developed as a result of prior exposure to Australia/overseas via transnationally mobile friends and family, media, and education. Rizvi, like Kim (2011), notes that most of the international students he interviewed were privileged in their home country and that their engagement with the global economy and culture was an important class marker. Importantly, Rizvi (2005: 80) recognises that identities – like class – are changeable, so while “international education is indeed a site where cosmopolitan identities are produced”, meanings attached to cosmopolitanism are variable.

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<sup>8</sup> These studies do not necessarily use the term cosmopolitan cultural capital, but they all describe a relationship between international student mobility and the accumulation of a specific type of cultural capital, variously identified as ‘transnational cultural capital’ and ‘global cultural capital’, in relation to the pursuit of cosmopolitan identities. For example, Kim defines ‘global cultural capital’ as “degree attainment, knowledge, taste, and cosmopolitan attitude and lifestyle” (2011: 113), which is similar to the way I am using ‘cosmopolitan cultural capital’ in this thesis.



With the exception of Rizvi's (2005) study, there is little scholarship that considers how cosmopolitan cultural capital relates to Indian international student mobility. Most of the studies cited above pertain to East Asian students, which is also a general trend in the literature on international student mobilities wherein East Asian students receive much more attention than South Asian students, despite India being the second largest sending country after China (UNESCO, 2017; see also Dutta & Shome, 2018). Understanding how young urban Indian people value cosmopolitan cultural capital accumulated via international education (and via other means) could, for instance, potentially reveal different legacies of colonialism as well as regional and cultural differences between major sending countries. This study seeks to address this gap by contributing a more nuanced understanding around the motivations, aspirations and expectations of Indian international students. Following the aforementioned argument that cosmopolitanism (as a form of cultural capital) is accumulated unevenly (Kim, 2011; Rizvi, 2005; Gilbertson, 2016), this study explores how the local notion of 'exposure' operates as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital that is differently valued according to an individual's localised micro-category of class.

### **'Exposure' as a Form of Cosmopolitan Cultural Capital**

The notion of 'gaining exposure' was central to how students and parents in this study imagined the value of international education. This term was used in almost every interview, though participants differed in what they considered to be legitimate evidence of exposure. As Chapter Six will discuss further, 'exposure' was conceptualised differently according to one's localised micro-category of class. The notion of exposure is a relatively under-developed concept in literature concerning class and education in India, which is surprising given its ubiquity in everyday discourse about education. However, there is some emerging work on this subject (see also Brown et al., 2017), which this section addresses.

In their article about engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu and the IT sector, Fuller and Narasimhan (2006: 260) identify 'exposure' in two conditions: the process (i.e. "I got good exposure") and the state (i.e. "I now have good exposure"). Their study found that 'exposure' was imagined as a positive attribute in the job market, a "key ingredient for success" (262). Fuller and Narasimhan (2006) also recognise that exposure is a class

project, in which the middle class are able to stipulate a requirement for exposure as a gatekeeping device and use this to their competitive advantage in educational and job fields, thereby reproducing their status in Indian society. In a similar vein, David Sancho's (2015) study of an elite international school in Kochi found that, in providing attractive educational options to the expanding upper-middle-class market, schools develop various curricula and pedagogies to 'expose' their students to 'international' and 'cosmopolitan' ethos, practices and orientations (see also Rizvi, 2014). 'Exposure' is thus a project of developing a 'global orientation' or knowledge of 'outside'. Amanda Gilbertson's (2014c, 2017a) research at an international school in suburban Hyderabad also recognised that acquiring exposure was an element of (re)creating relational class projects. Gilbertson's (2014c: 219) interlocutors positioned 'exposure' as "part of a broader project of aligning with global rationalism, progressiveness and open-mindedness and distancing from the 'irrational', 'superstitious' or 'backward' practices associated with villagers, the poor and the uneducated." In the context of international schools in particular, 'exposure' represents a cosmopolitan orientation toward the 'global'.

Carol Upadhy's (2016a) study of middle-class IT workers in South India revealed the importance of 'exposure' in professional spheres. Upadhy's respondents with international experience were understood to 'get ahead' in their career because they had been exposed to the English-speaking West (see also Radhakrishnan, 2011). However, Upadhy aptly warns that the "discourse of exposure, like that of merit, reveals the significance of 'background' for achieving middleclassness: the kinds of cultural capital that can be acquired through exposure via IT jobs are already available to the ... upper-caste segments of the middle classes in metropolitan areas" (2016a: 305). This is a particularly important argument in the context of international education as a product and experience that is largely limited to India's relatively elite (though there are some emerging options for Indian middle-class students but these do not appear to be as well-developed as the options for East Asian students, see Yang, 2018; Waters & Leung, 2014, 2017a). The desire for international exposure that will be examined primarily in Chapter Six, then, must be situated in the context of class projects that facilitate the (re)production of class, as this chapter discusses.

There are a number of reasons why international education is a key site to extend this body of research by examining the uneven distribution of cosmopolitan cultural capital. First, the international education track is exclusionary in that only some families can afford the additional expenses incurred by sending a child overseas to study, especially those from the Global South. It is therefore skewed towards the relatively elite. Second, although all relatively elite, differences in the socio-economic backgrounds of students can affect the nature of the cosmopolitan cultural capital they accumulate. Judgements about the amount and legitimacy of a person's cosmopolitan cultural capital appear to be a new form of distinction that the elite use to maintain their privilege as international education becomes a project pursued by different strata of the upper-middle class (discussed in Chapter Six). Third, examining how cosmopolitan cultural capital – often read as merit or talent (Gilbertson, 2016) – is used in the post-study lives of international students can reveal the ways in which class boundaries are reproduced via transnational mobility (discussed in Chapters Six and Seven). This study also examines how cosmopolitan cultural capital is most highly valued by participants when they are in India, suggesting that local identities and places are central to how cosmopolitan cultural capital accumulated via international education is expected to function as a form of distinction.

My analysis is situated within a broader literature on class in India and how individuals toil to distinguish themselves from others by accumulating various forms of (cosmopolitan) cultural capital via education. Relevant literature concerning class and education in India, much of which is anthropological, demonstrates that at every class gradient there are strategies that individual students and their families employ to differentiate themselves. For example, Craig Jeffrey's (2010) lower-middle-class participants in Meerut distinguished themselves by performing distinctly urban identities, as opposed to rural identities that would betray their origins. Jeffrey (2010) finds that for his young male participants, education is perceived as a pathway to stable employment, but that in reality many fail to secure private or public sector jobs and ultimately return to agricultural or low-skilled work. Despite the low chances of success and high rates of unemployment among Jeffrey's participants, they continued to pursue multiple degrees in the hope of realising their upwardly mobile aspirations. In Hyderabad, Amanda Gilbertson's (2014c, 2017a) middle-class respondents sought to attend 'international'

schools rather than local schools. Gilbertson's (2017a) participants expected that accessing more prestigious forms of education would equip children with 'soft skills' required to be successful in the job market, as well as providing them with cosmopolitan cultural capital that would mark their belonging to the middle class. Last, Fazal Rizvi (2014) discusses how old elite schools distinguish themselves from mushrooming international schools in India. Reflecting arguments outlined earlier in this chapter around the 'naturalness' of merit, Rizvi (2014: 292) argues that old elite schools "use history to forge a social imaginary with which to assert their social distinction, to represent their prestige as something self-evident and natural." The respondents in this study represent another aspect of this process of class distinction in relation to education.

Using international education and all the advantages that accompany that experience, participants differentiate themselves from those who cannot access international education, as well as from those who access international education in 'different' ways. The literature discussed in this section suggests that the accumulation of cosmopolitan cultural capital is central to distinguishing India's middle class. However, we know almost nothing about how India's upper-middle class and elite value or seek to acquire cosmopolitan cultural capital. As Chapter Six in particular will reveal, 'exposure' as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital is mobilised differently according to an individual's localised micro-category of class, which highlights the importance of attending to local and heterogeneous manifestations of class in order to systematically understand how class statuses are (re)produced. Furthermore, as social inequality is growing in India more people are endeavouring to achieve social mobility through education (Hill, Samson & Dasgupta, 2006; Jeffrey, 2010; Deuchar, 2014; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2006; Gilbertson, 2017a; Jeffrey et al., 2005; Rizvi, 2014; Sancho, 2015; Bhatt, Murty & Ramamurthy, 2010). As a result, this study suggests that the relatively elite are 'protecting' their position by creating distinction in relation to the 'right' 'way' to 'do' international education. At this juncture, it is thus important to understand exactly how the relatively elite are making these boundaries.

## **MOBILITY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

Recently there have been significant shifts in conceptualisations of movement, known collectively as the 'mobilities turn' (Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006). Citing a need

to depart from previously static understandings of movement, which also tended to privilege certain forms of movement (Adey et al., 2014), the founders of the so-called new mobilities paradigm have sought to develop an approach that considers ‘intersecting mobilities’ of people, goods, money and ideas (Hannam et al., 2006; Urry, 2000, 2007; Sheller & Urry, 2006). As Hannam et al. (2006: 1) state, “issues of movement, of too little movement or too much or of the wrong sort or at the wrong time, are central to many lives, organisations and governments.” In relation to the movement of people, the mobilities paradigm provides a useful point of departure for thinking about the nature of human mobility as a fluid process that is not neatly bound-up in specific beginnings and ends (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014). Rather, human (im)mobility is complex and fluid; it is produced and controlled across time and space (Cresswell, 2006; Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013). This conceptualisation allows scholars to consider the movement of an individual across borders in terms of ongoing flows and flexibilities, rather than as a static life event.

Emergent from the mobilities turn is the notion of ‘middling mobility’<sup>9</sup>, which I find important to discuss here because much of this research pertains to international students (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014; Soong et al., 2018; Robertson, 2018; Luthra & Platt, 2016; Rutten & Verstappen, 2014; see also Jaskułowski, 2017; Baas, 2017; Conway & Potter, 2012; Ho & Ley, 2014; Parutis, 2011; Batnitzky, McDowell & Dyer, 2007; Ho, 2011b). This body of literature focuses on people situated in the ‘middle’ in terms of both life-stage and class status, essentially arguing that class must be considered in relation to mobility experiences and as a precondition to transnational mobility. However, much of this literature assumes a fairly homogenous and static state of middleclassness both at home and away (Collins, 2014; Baas, 2017; Robertson, 2018). For instance, international students are often understood to belong to a global middle-class who have the resources and the aspirations to study abroad (for example, see Thomas, 2017; Sancho, 2015; Martin, 2018). Furthermore, much of the literature that does consider class in relation to non-Western international student mobilities focuses on East Asian students (for example, see Martin, 2018; Kim, 2011; Waters, 2005, 2006a, 2009; Xiang & Shen, 2009; Pu, 2014; Fong, 2011), and again, class nuances are not

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<sup>9</sup> This term was originally proposed by Conradson and Latham (2005a, 2005b) to describe young New Zealanders who temporarily move to the UK.

unpacked in these studies. Localised and heterogeneous manifestations of class identity in relation to international education thus remain under-explored overall and especially in relation to India. Given the large number of students that originate from India, the Indian context is arguably among the most important to explore from this perspective.

This lack of close attention to how ‘middle’ statuses are differently located and experienced has meant that ‘the middle’ itself is not well theorised. A brief review of the various groups that this literature covers – from skilled professionals in Singapore and Poland (Baas, 2017; Jaskułowski, 2017), to low-level workers in London (Rutten & Verstappen, 2014; Batnitzky et al., 2007), to student-migrants in Australia (Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014) – implies that there are varied socio-economic locations and mobilities within ‘the middle’. In her forthcoming work on young Asian temporary migrants in Australia, Robertson (2018: 20-21) provides a useful ‘expanded conceptualisation’ in which she understands the middle as:

...multiply constructed, not just as a signifier of socio-economic status or class positioning. Rather, ... the experiences of my migrant participants occupy multiple and intersecting spaces of the in-between. They move between different social and economic locations across a spectrum that sits in between the elite and the disenfranchised. They also often fall between or move across conventional understandings of mobility ‘type’, crossing between skilled and unskilled work, economic desires and lifestyle desires, sojourn and settlement. Furthermore, they exist in the middle space of the lifecourse, experiencing the transitions from youth to adulthood while ‘on the move’.

Robertson’s argument that socio-economic locations, life trajectories and cultures of mobility must be considered in relation to one another as interwoven factors is pertinent to this study, which seeks to unpack localised micro-categories of class in relation to both physical and socio-economic mobility in the context of young people’s lifecourses. Although the participants in this study are not located squarely in the middle section of class hierarchies in India, I find this conceptualisation of mobilities useful in order to situate youth mobilities as an ‘in between’ stage of life in which personal and professional transformations are desired and pursued. This study arguably adds a new dimension to this body of research by exploring how more elite international students experience this ‘middle’ stage of their lives as they shift into adulthood.

As Robertson (2018) suggests, international students occupy multiple ‘in between’ spaces in which status can be made and re-made as young people transition through various phases and stages of mobility. Within these ‘in between’ spaces, class status is not immobile, but is changeable according to specific circumstances. For instance, scholars have demonstrated that middle-class Indians can experience downward socio-economic mobility when they become transnationally mobile because the work they do in Western countries is not reflective of their socio-economic and educational status in India (Batnitzky et al., 2007; Rutten & Verstappen, 2014; Qureshi, Varghese & Osella, 2013). Rutten and Verstappen’s (2014: 1231) analysis of the ‘contradictory mobility experiences’ of youths from Gujarat who move to London concludes that these young people “are an illustration of the complexities and contradictory tendencies of the recent phase of globalisation that is characterised by increasing and differing forms of middle-class mobility.” These ‘differing forms of middle-class mobility’ suggest that more attention needs to be paid to this aspect of international student mobility in order to better understand how class status impacts students before they leave, while they are overseas and after they return, stay, or move on to a third location, which I seek to address in this study.

A recent study of Pakistani students in London authored by Luthra and Platt (2016) is perhaps the only extant study that highlights class heterogeneity within an international student body. Within their sample, Luthra and Platt identify three class groups: elite, ‘networked middling’ and ‘middle-class middling’. Luthra and Platt find that some international students are a subset of skilled migrants who form part of the global elite, who possess high levels of capital and whose movement is largely unconstrained. However, increasingly complex and fraught experiences of international student mobility suggest that relatively few (non-Western) students are likely to fall into this elite category who move without friction (see also Robertson, 2013). The SoBo elite students in this study, however, could be considered part of this elite. Though this is not to suggest that their movement is frictionless. On the contrary, SoBo elites, by virtue of their nationality, are subject to similar constraints – relating to acquiring visas and having qualifications recognised, for example – as suburban strivers and other non-Western international students. However, their access to capital means that the way they experience international student mobility is likely to be smoother, as this thesis will demonstrate in

Chapters Five, Six and Seven. In relation to their middling categories, Luthra and Platt (2016: 319) contend that the massive global growth in international student numbers in recent years suggests that this “larger group of international students is therefore likely to be more diverse in background and intentions.” Like Luthra and Platt’s two middling categories, I situate my suburban striver participants as part of this middling group that are not part of the traditional elite who travel for education (Jones, 2013).

I follow Robertson (2018) in understanding my participants as occupying multiple middle spaces in which class status is not fixed, but is fluid and shifts across time and space. In this sense, “the middle, as a social location, is itself mobile” (Robertson, 2018: 24). Throughout this study I attend to localised micro-categories of class in the place of students’ origin, which reveals that status shifts differently for the two class groups that I identify. For the SoBo elite, their localised class status appears to remain somewhat constant as they progress through their international education. For instance, this group recognises class-related differences between themselves and other Indians whilst overseas, which they use as a signifier of their relative superiority and privilege outside India as well as at home. However, this group also experiences – and desires – temporary downward mobility as part of their international education, which is seen as necessary in the quest for self-actualisation (discussed in Chapter Six). The status of these elite students is also fluid in the sense that they are aware that they are often ‘second class citizens’ in the countries that they study in (Chapter Seven), which represents a downward turn in their otherwise privileged position and is sometimes cited as a reason to return to India after graduating.

Unlike the SoBo elite, suburban strivers seek international education with a mind to achieve upward socio-economic mobility via foreign degrees, workplace experience in a Western country and secure long-term employment. This group essentially seeks to leave their localised class status behind when they become transnationally mobile, because the very act of being mobile is a marker of privilege that distinguishes them from peers at home (see also Waters, 2006a; Brooks, Waters & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Tran, 2016). International education therefore bears the potential to elevate suburban strivers into a higher class group than they occupy in India. However, this group is vulnerable to experiencing unwanted downward mobility (as opposed to the desired downward



mobility mentioned above) if they return to India prematurely (discussed in Chapter Seven).

As such, a Bourdieusian lens focused on different forms of capital and how they produce distinction proves to be one of the most productive ways to understand international student mobility (Yang & Chen, 2018). Scholars of student mobilities are increasingly attending to the relationship between international education and the accumulation of (cosmopolitan) cultural capital in particular, which students anticipate will enhance their position if they return home by distinguishing them from others (Waters, 2005, 2006a; Holloway et al., 2012), or if they decide to remain in the host country or pursue further mobilities (Luthra & Platt, 2016; Mosneaga & Winther, 2013; Baas, 2010). For instance, Holloway et al. (2012: 2279) contend that cultural capital accumulated by studying overseas is “most easily realised through return to a home country”, but that these return trajectories can be differently impacted by gender. In their Kazakhstani empirical context, Holloway et al. (2012) find that locally-specific notions of heteronormativity are reflected in the cultural importance of Islam, which results in women facing difficulties in realising the value of their cultural capital particularly in the labour market. Holloway et al. (2012) ultimately argue that while class status is certainly important, additional axes of social difference – namely gender, sexuality and religion – must be taken into consideration alongside class.

This thesis furthers this project by examining how the relatively elite accumulate and deploy capital – particularly cosmopolitan cultural capital – acquired via international education. This approach to studying international student mobility, coupled with my decision to interview young people before they depart and after they return from international education, importantly provides a perspective that does *not* consider the experiences of students while they are overseas. Furthermore, as I discuss later in this chapter and in Chapter Three, I also took gender into consideration in designing the study and analysing the data.

## **STUDENT MOBILITY AND THE LIFECOURSE**

Although much has been written about student mobilities in recent years, much of the work remains narrowly framed within push-pull frameworks (Wu & Wilkes, 2017;

Van Hear, Bakewell & Long, 2018; Mazzarol & Suiitor, 2002); the internationalisation of higher education (Harmon, 2015; Harris, 2008; Kehm & Teichler, 2007); and experiences of students when they are abroad (Caluya, Probyn & Vyas, 2011; Baas, 2010; Robertson, 2013). A conspicuous omission from this body of literature is the role that international education plays in the wider lifecourses of young people. Rather than understanding international education as an isolated experience, we need to learn more about how young people's ability and desire to travel for education is shaped by their lives prior to overseas study and how overseas study in turn shapes their lives after graduation (Collins et al., 2017; Caldwell & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016; Robertson, Cheng & Yeoh, 2018a).

Emerging scholarship frames mobility as a rite of passage within the lifecourses young people (Prazeres et al., 2017; Findlay et al., 2015; Findlay et al., 2012; Mosneaga & Winther, 2013; Collins & Shubin, 2015; King et al., 2004). However, the notion of transnational mobility as an 'experience' has largely been connected to Western international students, while non-Western students tend to be positioned as economically motivated potential migrants (Robertson, 2015<sup>10</sup>). Non-Western students are also perceived as risk takers who roll the metaphorical dice with migration regimes (Robertson, 2013; Baas, 2010) and take on education loans that could place financial strain on families back home (Thomas, 2017; Baas, 2007, 2014; Robertson, 2015; Findlay et al., 2017; discussed further in Chapter Five). However, scholarship on mobility as a rite of passage for non-Western – particularly Asian – youth *is* beginning to emerge (Yoon, 2014b, 2015; Robertson, 2014, 2018; Ho, 2011a; 2011b; Zhang et al., 2017; Tsai & Collins, 2017), but more is still needed to break down the binary that positions Western youth mobility as 'self-actualisation' and non-Western youth mobility as 'economic' (see also Collins & Shubin, 2015). In the context of Asia, Yang and Chen (2018: 44) aptly observe that "pursuing educational mobility is seldom about education/learning *per se* but is often deeply embedded in specific social contexts and motivated by socio-culturally shaped desires and imaginaries." Student mobility thus needs to be recognised as a rite of passage for a wide array young people as they transition from youth to adulthood, which can be

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<sup>10</sup> For the Western student 'experience', see Waters & Brooks, 2010; Wilson, Fisher & Moore, 2010; Desforges, 1998; Waters, Brooks & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Wilson et al., 2010; for non-Western students see Wu, 2014; Baas, 2006; Robertson, 2013; Waters, 2006a; Azmat et al., 2013; Hawthorne, 2010; Jackling, 2007; Zigarus & Law, 2006; Hawthorne & Hamilton, 2010; Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Gribble, 2008; Birrell, Healy & Kinnaird, 2007.

experienced in conjunction with other aspirations pertaining to career and mobility trajectories.

A lifecourse perspective importantly encourages the mobility of young people, via international education in this case, to be situated within a broader context of processes and structures that shape society and therefore shape mobility (Findlay et al., 2015; King et al., 2011; Prazeres et al., 2017). As King et al. (2004: 19) contend, “the lifecourse framework contextualises not only individual and group decisions about the timing of migrations but also the formative influences and outcomes.” This approach also situates mobility as a process rather than a static event, reflecting the new mobilities paradigm described above. Despite growing recognition that analyses of student mobilities are best situated within the lifecourse perspective, relatively few studies are conducted with international students before they leave or after they return (Raghuram, 2013; Collins et al., 2017), which means that we know relatively little of how international education impacts the lives of young people in the longer-term.

Studies are rarely conducted with prospective students in their home countries prior to departure, although many studies seek to address this phase of mobility once students arrive in the destination country, or after they have graduated and returned home, by asking about their aspirations, motivations and expectations in becoming a mobile student (for example, see Lu, Zong & Schissel, 2009; Findlay et al., 2012, 2017; Baláž & Williams, 2004; Wu, 2014; King & Sondhi, 2018; Marcu, 2015; Kim, 2011; Prazeres, 2017; Sondhi, 2015). Students who return home, on the other hand, have received slightly more attention though this remains a significant gap in the literature. As Collins et al. (2017) observe, while studying overseas is expected to distinguish students from those who studied at domestic institutions, little is known about the actual outcomes of international education for graduates. It is possible that this has been largely overlooked because, as Baas (2010) notes, returning home is not typically considered part of neo-liberal push-pull conceptualisations of migration.

Existing literature reveals that experiences of returning home are highly varied. Several authors find that returning home is anticipated to result in upward mobility for students who imagine that their foreign-acquired (cosmopolitan) cultural capital will be more highly valued at home rather than abroad (Waters, 2006a; Tran, 2016; Rizvi, 2014).

Other scholars note that imaginaries of return are changeable over time. As students progress through their international education they can experience shifts in their aspirations and desires, resulting in the notion of returning home becoming more enticing (Marcu, 2015; Wu, 2014) or less enticing (Findlay et al., 2017). A student's imaginary of return can also remain fixed if they are participating in a scholarship program, usually sponsored by the home government, which requires them to return home after graduating (Holloway et al., 2012). Other studies further note that the possibility of return can represent failure of students to realise post-study goals, such as gaining a job or onward migration (Findlay et al., 2017; Thomas, 2017), or that return trajectories are different according to an individual's gender (Lu et al., 2009; Sondhi & King, 2017). These studies emphasise that return trajectories are variable, fluid and complex. However, with the exception of Waters (2006a) and Sondhi and King (2017), these studies collect data from students whilst they are engaged in international education, so the results are not able to speak to how students *actually* experience returning home.

A recent paper by Collins et al. (2017), however, focuses entirely on data collected from returned students. In their study of the narratives of alumni who have studied overseas in three leading universities in East Asia, Collins et al. (2017) found that the anticipation of successful careers (and lives, broadly) after obtaining a foreign degree was the primary motivator for international student mobility. Arguing that “an overseas degree is not simply a socially and culturally infused credential but one whose value is articulated through a whole range of other geographical connections and disconnections,” Collins et al. (2017: 13) observe that international education (re)produces uneven social positions among graduates, driven by “historically situated geopolitical relations between nations, the transnationalisation of production and consumption in Asia, and the formation of social networks of graduates from particular universities.” With this in mind, along with the knowledge that international education is increasingly commonplace and accessible to more people<sup>11</sup>, Collins et al. (2017) recommend that future research needs a wider agenda that encompasses not only the accounts of students but also the conversion and portability of learning and capital in after-study lives (see also Waters, 2006a). This thesis

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<sup>11</sup> For example, refer to substantial increases in international student numbers reported by UNESCO (2017), which demonstrate that there has been a global increase in international student numbers as well as a similarly substantial increase in Indian student numbers over the past two decades.

seeks to address this call in Part Two by exploring how experiences of return are impacted by one's localised micro-category of class, which situates class status in relation to international education and the lifecourse.

To comprehensively understand how international student mobility relates to the lifecourse as well as class status, research must also pay more attention to the 'sending site'. This is an often-overlooked factor in international student mobilities literature. International students come from specific backgrounds that are embedded in place as well as culture (Prazeres et al., 2017; Caluya et al., 2011). 'Culture' has received some attention in relation to international student mobilities, primarily as a factor that underpins mobilities – i.e. 'cultures of migration' (Karupiah, 2018; Findlay et al., 2017; see also Ali, 2007). Scholars have also addressed the role of 'place' in relation to the destination country, primarily in relation to how students make decisions about international education (Beech, 2014; Prazeres et al., 2017; Waters, 2009; Van Mol & Ekamper, 2016; see also Leung & Waters, 2013a). Some scholars have also addressed the impact of student mobilities on local destination geographies. Collins (2004, 2010), for example, demonstrates the various ways in which South Korean students in Auckland transform urban space and city culture when they engage with the host site.

However, a key gap remains in that we know very little about urban landscapes, like Mumbai, as significant sites from which international students originate. If, as I have argued, we are to understand international student mobility within the lifecourse and in relation to class status, we must know more about where students come from and what their experiences are beyond their international education, which includes how this relates to place. As Caluya et al. (2011: 89) note, the class and region that Indian students belong to "back home" shapes "who they are" in Australia as well as why they decided to study in Australia. In order to develop a richer picture of international student mobilities, it is therefore crucial to examine students at home as well as abroad. By attending to localised micro-categories of class in Mumbai and exploring how these relate to international student mobility both prior to and after studying overseas in the context of the sending city, this thesis makes a unique and important contribution to the literature discussed here.

## **GENDER, MOBILITY AND CLASS**

In seeking to understand the interplay between class status, international student mobility and lifecourses, gender should not be overlooked as an important consideration that impacts how these factors relate to one another (Holloway et al., 2012; Yakaboski, Sheridan & Dade, 2013). While a great deal of scholarship has argued for closer attention to gender within migration studies (for example, see Mahler & Pessar, 2001; Donato et al., 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Lutz, 2010), the majority of the literature on women's migrations and mobilities is not about middle-class or elite women, nor does it consider international student mobilities from a gendered perspective. In this thesis I contribute towards remedying this significant gap in the existing research. However, although I was constantly mindful of the role of gender in producing (im)mobilities whilst conducting this research, it did not emerge as a central focus from the dataset. I therefore attend to gender only where it revealed significant nuance or difference in terms of individual aspirations or experiences, namely in Chapters Six and Eight. Nonetheless, many other studies have demonstrated the relevance of gender in relation to mobilities as well as class (for example, see Holloway et al., 2012; Batnitzky et al., 2007; Bailey & Mulder, 2017; Gardner, 2009; Yakaboski et al., 2013; Skeggs, 2004; Massey, 1994). In this section I discuss this literature in order to frame my research. This is, however, a very large body of literature so here I limit my brief discussion primarily to middle-class Indian women's (transnational) mobilities, particularly in relation to education and work, where the notion of 'respectability' is central to how women are (un)able to move through the world.

Scholars have argued that Indian middle-class women's bodies, and therefore their mobilities, have been limited and controlled since the colonial period when Hindu ideals of the 'good wife' merged with Victorian ideals of femininity (Radhakrishnan, 2009; Talukdar & Linders, 2013; Gilbertson, 2014b). Chatterjee (1989, 1993) has argued that, as part of the postcolonial nationalist project within India, women's role in society became that of the nurturer whose primary responsibility was to ensure the spiritual wellbeing of the home and family – of the 'inner'. The transformation of women's role in society gave rise to a powerful new dichotomy of the 'inner' and 'outer' that remains relevant in India today as respectability is still held up as an ideal and expected component of Indian middle-class femininity (Twamley & Sidharth, 2018; Radhakrishnan, 2009). Indian feminine respectability is thus read primarily through the embodiment of 'family

values', (Hindu) spirituality and modesty (Dickey, 2000; Gilbertson, 2014b; Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011). In order to uphold expectations around respectability, however, women must comport and confine themselves to maintain boundaries between the 'inner' and 'outer'. As Gilbertson (2014b: 157) writes, the respectability of women therefore "requires either limits to movement, overt display of respectability in terms of dress or comportment, or the ability to physically separate oneself from the dirt and disorder of the outside."

In postcolonial India, and especially in the period following economic liberalisation in the 1990s, academic research and Indian media alike have identified the emergence of 'the new Indian woman' (Lau, 2006, 2010; Bhatt et al., 2010; Thapan, 2001; Mankekar, 2009; for media examples see Rathi, 2016; Thapar, 2017; Deb, 2015). During the 1990s, Indian women entered the workforce and educational institutions *en masse* and "emerged as fully engaged participants in the global economy" (Talukdar & Linders, 2013: 106). Middle-class women's role in society therefore became more than homemaker and carer; she now takes on a 'new' role as worker as well as consumer, but is still expected to uphold 'traditional' values associated with respectability of self as well as her household (Rajan, 1993; Daya, 2009). Economic liberalisation, scholars have argued, has thus resulted in a series of contradictions for urban middle-class women (Brosius, 2010; Talukdar & Linders, 2013; Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Twamley & Sidharth, 2018).

Women IT workers have provided some of the most fertile ground to discuss the often-contradictory relationship between mobility and notions of both Indianness and feminine respectability (Radhakrishnan, 2008, 2009, 2011; Flemming, 2016). Smitha Radhakrishnan (2011) demonstrates that Indian female IT workers in the US must find ways to balance tensions between 'Westernness' and 'Indianness' as they navigate their personal and professional lives outside but still very much connected to India (see also Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Gilbertson, 2014b). She writes that a "gendered notion of 'balance'" exists for these mobile women, who seek to preserve 'Indian family values' by creating a 'new' or 'global' 'Indianness' which involves dedicating themselves to their spouses and domestic responsibilities whilst simultaneously balancing their professional duties and aspirations (2008: 8; 2011). Rachel Flemming (2016) similarly finds that

balance is a central concern for female IT worker participants in Bangalore, who sought to gain ‘exposure’ via their careers. Flemming (2016: 87) explains that the notion of exposure was often described in terms of “a sense of expanded knowledge about the world linked to class-based distinction, progressive thinking, consuming media from abroad or living abroad, or meeting different people and learning about different points of view”, which is similar to the participants in my study (discussed in Chapter Six). However, in Flemming’s study, exposure also carried a “subtext of moral danger” associated with the threats posed to women who become ‘too exposed’ and are therefore sexually vulnerable (2016: 87-90). As Radhakrishnan (2011: 166-7) also writes, when women have ‘too much’ freedom it is associated with the breakdown of values which threatens the family and the Indian nation.

Anxieties around women having ‘too much’ freedom have also been identified within the small number of studies that consider Indian international student mobilities from a gendered perspective (Sondhi & King, 2017; Forsberg, 2017). For instance, in her study of young aspirant international students from Kerala, Forsberg (2017) finds that girls’ mobilities are constrained by parents wanting to keep female children closer to home in order to ensure their ‘protection’, and therefore her respectability. Likewise, Sondhi and King (2017: 1315) note that for some parents, a child moving abroad is seen as “a loss of the power of control.” Sondhi and King (2017) also find that a parent’s level of education is likely to impact how they view the transnational mobility of a child, with university-educated parents being more accepting of this ‘loss of control’ – especially where mothers are university-educated (see also Sondhi, 2015). In her study of Keralan and Punjabi women studying nursing in Canada, Margaret Walton-Roberts (2015a) finds that her participants’ *independent* mobility is potentially confined by familial migration projects. Walton-Roberts (2015a) argues that many of these families decide the occupational trajectory of young women in order to take advantage of the migration bridgehead that their mobility provides for the whole family, who can then follow her to Canada.

Young women, on the other hand, suggest that transnational mobility would allow them to achieve the freedoms they desire. In Karupiah’s (2018: 340) study of young people in Chennai, young women perceived that becoming mobile would “help them



escape from gendered and hierarchical relationships.” However, Karupiah (2018) argues that ‘traditional gender roles’ continue to influence the mobility aspirations of her participants and that young women imagine their ‘escape’ from home as a way to “build a more egalitarian marital relationship” by being overseas and therefore outside of joint family living arrangements (340; for a paper that discusses joint family arrangements in middle-class urban Indian families, see Donner, 2016). Karupiah (2018) contrasts this to her male participants, who reported a desire to become transnationally mobile in order to improve the economic conditions of their families, suggesting that archetypal binaries of male breadwinner/female homemaker (Sondhi & King, 2017) are still at play in the era of the ‘new Indian woman’.

Other studies of Indian international students also found that archetypal gender roles colour mobility experiences and trajectories, especially those of unmarried young people. In their study of Indian students in Canada, Sondhi and King (2017; see also Sondhi 2015) found that return trajectories in particular are strongly affected by a student’s gender, wherein men are more likely to return to India in order to fulfil their caring duties to ageing parents and to secure a good job and get married, in line with normative lifecourse expectations. While women, according to Sondhi and King (2017), tended to lament their need to return to India (usually due to visa expiry, job prospects or to be close to their parents), and sought pathways that would lead to employment outside India in the long-term. In their study of engineering postgraduate South Indian students in the USA, Yakaboski et al. (2013) similarly find that normative gendered expectations underpin the experiences of their participants. In one example, Yakaboski et al. (2013) contend that while women in their study were able to use advanced education as a strategy to delay their marriages, some of them were unable to wait until they had graduated before succumbing to pressure to marry at the ‘right’ time. Gender differences were also apparent in relation to marriage opportunities, wherein highly educated men experienced increased prospects in the arrange marriage market, while women sometimes had difficulty finding an equally educated man from the same region and caste.

My study reflects these themes (discussed primarily in Part Two), however, my close attention to class reveals that in Mumbai return and marriage trajectories are perhaps more indicative of class status rather than gender. In this sense, one of the key

contributions that I make to this emerging body of literature is to demonstrate that questions about gender must also be examined in relation to class. Like the broader literature on international student mobilities, these studies in relation to gender tend to situate their participants as middle class or elite without unpacking what belonging to the middle actually means. This study also uniquely included students and their parents in the sample, which helps to unpack questions around gender in more nuanced ways, as Part Two will demonstrate.

## **CONCEPTUALISING THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION INDUSTRY**

An important component of Mumbai as the ‘sending site’, as discussed above, is the international education industry that services prospective students and their families. As Chapter Five will discuss further, the international education industry is central to the experiences of many individuals and families as they seek to understand and make decisions about international education. It is therefore important to understand what role class – namely localised micro categories of class – plays in how the industry operates. Specifically, I argue that an individual’s class status not only impacts their individual aspirations and experiences pertaining to international education, but that the industry that is largely responsible for facilitating student mobilities is also impacted by (assumptions about) class status. In this section I therefore attend to existing literature concerning the international education industry. In this section I seek to highlight that, despite a large body of literature devoted to the study of migration and mobilities, we know relatively little about how mobilities are shaped by the mechanisms that enable the movement of people across borders (Findlay et al., 2013). Discussion is however emerging around how to conceptualise the spaces in which actors such as education agents and counsellors operate, which I discuss below.

The mobilities paradigm – outlined earlier in this chapter – provides an opportunity for migration research to become more sensitive to the actors and networks that facilitate mobilities (Cranston, Schapendonk & Spaan, 2018). However, existing work does not grapple with the function of these industries and is instead interested primarily in migratory flows and experiences (Cranston, 2017; Hernández-León, 2013). Seeking to address this gap, Sophie Cranston’s recent work makes an important contribution towards theorising migration industries. With Schapendonk and Spaan,

Cranston (2018: 543) argues that focusing on migration industries not only allows us “to gain empirical insights into the mechanisms by and through which people move, [but] also provides us with an analytical lens to better unpack the social, economic and geographical complexities of migration processes.” By considering the function of class status in the context of Mumbai’s international education industry, I attend to some of these socio-economic complexities that are embedded within migration processes.

Migration brokers are a crucial component of many migration industries. Migration industries encompass the facilitation and control of migration and provide assistance at various phases of migration, including resources and services that facilitate movement across physical and regulatory barriers and borders (Cranston et al., 2018). While there is a growing body of research examining the activities of brokers within migration industries, especially in relation to labour and skilled migration (Harvey, Groutsis & van den Broek, 2018; Lindquist, 2012, 2015, 2017; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014; McCollum & Findlay, 2018; Žabko, Aasland & Endresen, 2018; Linquist, Xiang & Yeoh, 2012), comparably little is known about the brokerage of international education.

Existing research relating to the brokerage of international education varies in focus but tends to examine how brokers produce and mediate student mobilities in specific ways. Some studies highlight the exploitative potential of education brokers, such as Adhikari’s (2010) study how of international education consultants in Nepal are involved in producing the transnational mobility of nurses who are potentially vulnerable to exploitation. Other studies, however, view the role of education brokers as more ‘ambivalent’ than ‘malevolent’, and consider their embeddedness into wider structures and networks of relations. Beech (2018), for example, importantly highlights how brokers exist in a network of relations with staff in receiving universities and Thieme (2017) details how agents in Nepal professionalise the brokerage of international education by establishing associations and codes of conduct. Collins (2012) argues that agents in New Zealand act as “bridges” between students, families and their places of origin and their study destinations, thereby traversing a divide between the profit-oriented education industry and the social lives of students and their families. The data presented in this thesis, specifically in Chapter Five, adds significantly to this existing work by bringing a class perspective to understanding the mediation of international education. Specifically,

it seeks to address how the mediation of international education and the roles of education brokers are differentiated along distinctions between localised micro-categories of class.

Incorporating the concept of class into discourse about international education industries not only aids understanding of individuals' expectations and experiences of mobility, but also provides an opportunity to contribute to discussion around the reproduction of inequality via migration industries. In his conceptual paper, Faist (2014) contends that brokers do not exist in isolation but are embedded within social patterns that potentially (re)produce inequality. However, the ways in which migration industries contribute to the reproduction of inequality in specific local contexts require further empirical analysis (for an exception, see Cranston, 2018). Migration industries, like migrants themselves, are entangled in social and cultural processes that structure inequalities (Findlay et al., 2013; Cook and Butz, 2016). As Lin et al. argue (2017: 168), migration industries create "unequal categories of migrants" by giving certain mobilities significance and status. In this sense, the role of international education industry also impacts how class status is (re)produced via international student mobilities, as I will discuss further in Chapter Five. This study is also unique in that I include perspectives of students as well as international education brokers (agents and counsellors) in the sending country, by which I aim to provide a more nuanced and holistic approach to discussion of the international education industry in Mumbai.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has sought to highlight that class status and transnational mobility are inextricably linked, whilst also introducing key theoretical frameworks that underpin the analysis presented in the empirical chapters that follow. I have also outlined the ways in which this thesis contributes to literature pertaining to class, capital and (international student) mobility. Specifically, I adopt a Bourdieusian approach to conceptualising class, though I find that this alone is an insufficient theory to underpin a contemporary study of class in urban India. I thus extend Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) notions of capital, taste and distinction by incorporating the concept of cosmopolitan cultural capital (Weenink, 2007, 2008; Igarashi & Saito, 2014) into my theoretical framework. In this chapter I also reviewed literature pertaining to capital and class in urban India, finding that the upper-middle class and elite have been overlooked in these studies, which this thesis seeks to

contribute towards rectifying. The role of transnational mobility has also been overlooked in studies of class in India, as has the relationship between international student mobility and the accumulation of cosmopolitan cultural capital, which I address throughout this thesis.

In this chapter I have also explained my decision to use the notion of ‘mobility’ (rather than ‘migration’) to frame my discussion around the transnational movement of students. There are four key gaps in this literature that I identify in this chapter, and seek to address throughout this thesis. First, a review of literature pertaining to Western versus non-Western student mobilities reveals that, on the whole, the mobilities of Western students tend to be framed in terms of ‘adventure’, ‘experience’ and ‘self-actualisation’, while non-Western students tend to be constructed as ‘migrants’ who are economically motivated to (permanently) leave their home countries. The data presented in the empirical chapters of this thesis demonstrate that this binary is problematic because, by studying the relatively elite through a prism of ‘localised micro-categories of class’, it is revealed that students from the same sending site can have vastly different expectations and aspirations in terms of what they hope to achieve or gain by becoming transnationally mobile – reflecting both the attributes associated with Western international students as well as those of non-Western students.

Second, I reviewed literature that considers international student mobility from a lifecourse perspective, finding that this is certainly a useful approach to conceptualising the movement of students because the basic premise is that mobility does not occur in isolation. Despite the strength of this approach, few studies have been conducted with students before they leave or after they return from international education, which this thesis addresses by explicitly *not* focusing on students whilst they are overseas. This oversight has also meant that little is known about where students come from and where they may ultimately return to (i.e. the sending site), and how geographical place relates to experiences of international student mobility. This thesis attends to this gap by studying prospective and returned students at the sending site, as well as by examining the international education industry that facilitates the mobilities of students. In reviewing literature pertaining to migration industries and the international education industry more specifically, I found that we know relatively little about how these industries work (see

also Cranston, 2018; Findlay et al., 2013). In this thesis I offer a novel perspective by exploring how the international education industry in Mumbai is impacted by assumptions about class status, thus revealing how this industry contributes to the reproduction of class inequalities in local sending contexts.

Third, I reviewed an emerging body of literature that conceptualises the movement of non-Westerners as ‘middling mobilities’ (Robertson, 2018; Baas, 2017; Robertson & Runganaikaloo, 2014; Soong et al., 2018; Luthra & Platt, 2016; Rutten & Verstappen, 2014; Jaskułowski, 2017; Conway & Potter, 2012; Ho & Ley, 2014; Ho, 2011b). While I find the middling mobilities approach useful because it promotes the notion that there exist multiple middle spaces that are fluid and shift across time and space, I also argue that this body of literature lacks nuanced theorisation of ‘the middle’. I therefore contend that we must examine class statuses, lifecourses and mobilities as interwoven factors. Another key area of literature pertaining to international student mobilities in which class status has been overlooked is those studies that consider the role of gender in the experiences and trajectories of non-Western international students. In this section I reviewed literature that considers gender and mobility in relation to the Indian middle class, finding that ‘respectability’ is a common theme within this literature as well as in the sections of this thesis that consider gender (Chapters Six and Eight). However, the interwoven relationship/s between gender, international student mobilities, lifecourses and class are largely unobserved. This thesis is thus located at two overarching gaps in the literature: that in studies relating to international student mobility, class status is often overlooked or inadequately theorised, while studies of class in India have tended to overlook the role of transnational mobility in (re)producing (relatively elite) class status.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ENCOUNTERING THE FIELD: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In this chapter I discuss the ways in which data for this thesis have been generated and analysed. I conducted seventeen months of fieldwork in Mumbai from 2015-2016, as well as one month of pre-fieldwork scoping interviews in 2014. I interviewed 80 participants in total, and used a grounded theory approach to design the research and analyse the data. Taking the view that researchers are embedded within the field site and their research more broadly, I also reflect on my own interest in the topic of this thesis as well as my subjectivity as a white, Australian, female, middle-class researcher in a postcolonial society and how this might have impacted the data collection.

#### ANTICIPATING THE FIELD

In thinking about the aims of the research and where best to conduct fieldwork, I considered my prior experiences in India and Australia, as well as scholarly literature (outlined in Chapter One and Two). In Melbourne, the part-time job I held during my undergraduate degrees was with a mid-sized Registered Training Organisation (RTO) that enrolled only international students, almost entirely from South Asia, who completed vocational courses that transitioned to Permanent Residency visas in Australia (see also Baas, 2010, 2016; Robertson, 2013, 2015; Sancho, 2017; Caluya et al., 2011; Azmat et al., 2013). This experience sparked my interest in student mobility and international education. Adding to these experiences that underlie my decision to pursue this research, I had lived in Mumbai previously (2010-2011) when I worked on a podcasting start-up. A significant portion of my role involved networking within many different echelons of Mumbai society in order to produce podcasts with high school and university students, residents of the *Dharavi* slum, high-power businesspeople, artists, musicians, and so on. In the years since then, many of the people within these networks have contacted me with questions about studying in Australia, which furthered my curiosity about international education. Further, when I was considering fieldwork sites in India, it was not difficult to recall the many challenges I faced in finding my way in a huge metropolis in 2010. It was a logical decision to conduct research in Mumbai, where I had existing networks and knowledge that would help facilitate the research.

Furthermore, Mumbai is arguably the key urban centre for the ‘new’ middle classes described in academic literature (Fernandes, 2000, 2006; Nijman, 2006; Brosius, 2010; Baud, 2015), as well as the longstanding seat of India’s elite, many of whom moved to Mumbai in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as her port grew and economic opportunities expanded (Patel, 2003; Chandravarkar, 1994; Baud & Nainan, 2008). Mumbai was also an important economic centre during British colonial rule, which foregrounded her current status as an economic powerhouse (Chandravarkar, 1994). Today, Mumbai is India’s wealthiest city with \$950 billion held in private wealth, home to 28 billionaires and 46,000 millionaires (Times of India, 2018; Indian Express, 2017). As a very large metropolis, I also assumed that there would be ample numbers of agents and counsellors as well as students who would be prospective participants – although there have been few, if any, publications that address Mumbai’s international students and the industry that caters to them (for an exception see Tuxen & Robertson, 2018). For these reasons, Mumbai was a logical site in which to conduct a study that is concerned with both international education and class.

### **Designing the Research using Grounded Theory**

The basic premise of grounded theory, first disseminated in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), is that conclusions and theory should *emerge* from the data rather than as a result of preconceived hypotheses, which places greater emphasis on the *development* of an explanatory framework or ‘theory’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In Glaser and Strauss (1967)’s seminal work the key components of grounded theory practice are, as summarised by Charmaz (2006: 5-6):

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis;
- Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses;
- Using a constant comparison method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of analysis;
- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis;
- Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specifically their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps;
- Sampling aimed toward theory construction (theoretical sampling), not for population representativeness;



- Conducting the literature reviews after developing an independent analysis.

While these elements remain the foundational components of grounded theory, a split occurred between Glaser and Strauss in the late 1980s and 1990s (Charmaz, 2006), resulting in theoretical divorce. Consequently, the grounded theory tradition has three main but divergent threads: Glaserian (Classic), Straussian (with Corbin), and the more recently proposed Constructivist grounded theory.

In brief, classic Glaserian grounded theory reflects the original statement of grounded theory, in which Glaser (1978, 1992, 2001, 2002) has retained all concepts and instructions laid out in the seminal text, *Discovery* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).<sup>12</sup> With Holton (2004, para. 7), Glaser contends that grounded theory's "data collection and analysis procedures are explicit and the pacing of these procedures is, at once, simultaneous, sequential, subsequent, scheduled and serendipitous, forming an integrated methodological 'whole' that enables the emergence of conceptual theory".

Strauss (1987), and later Strauss with Corbin (1990, 1994, 1999), depart from Glaser's classic grounded theory, marked primarily by their emphasis on verification of data. Straussian grounded theory is concerned with the generation of theory, *and* the *testing* of the theory through a more structured approach to 'doing' grounded theory (for example, see Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Similar to Glaser, Strauss and Corbin's 'reworked' grounded theory (1990, 1994, 1998) maintains the original principles of theoretical sampling, constant comparison, coding, memo-writing and theoretical saturation. However, in their texts published throughout the 1990s, Strauss and Corbin added the notions of open, axial and selective coding, as well as 'dimensionalising', coding paradigm and the conditional matrix. Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory also welcomes reinterpretation and reinvention by scholars with alternative ontological views and disciplinary backgrounds (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

In the early 2000s, a group of authors proposed 'constructivist grounded theory' (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Clarke, 2003, 2005; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007),

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<sup>12</sup> In Glaser's 1978 text, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, he added the principles of modifiability, substantive and theoretical coding, and sorting.

which aligns with Strauss and Corbin's interpretation (Glaser, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the words of Charmaz (2006: 9-10), "constructivist grounded theory adopts the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original statement. It includes the iterative logic that Strauss emphasized in his early teaching, as well as the dual emphases on action and meaning inherent in the pragmatist tradition." The pivotal point of departure between the original statement of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and constructivist grounded theory is the perceived position of the researcher in the analysis and reporting of data.

Though remaining cognisant and careful not to 'pick and mix' some grounded theory processes and club them with other methods (Goulding, 2002: 161; see also Lee & Fielding, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I do not follow Glaserian/Classic, Straussian (with Corbin) or Constructivist grounded theory to the tee. As Timmermans and Tivory (2012) note, grounded theory's inductive method is problematic for many researchers, most of whom are not able to 'ignore' the literature as Glaser and Strauss suggest. I thus adopt Strauss and Corbin's (1994) approach to the literature review, wherein the literature can be consulted prior to entering the field in order to formulate research questions and inform the development of theory.<sup>13</sup> I then implement Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original principles of theoretical sampling, constant comparison, memo-writing, categorising, and saturation. Last, I adopt Strauss's (1987) and Corbin and Strauss' (1990, 1994, 2008) coding paradigm.

Prior to entering the field, I developed a series of queries that the fieldwork would then pursue. In line with Strauss and Corbin (1990), I designed research questions at the beginning of the fieldwork period that reflected what I knew about the subject and identified the subject/s to be studied. I developed a central question and three sub-questions, as follows. However, as I collected and analysed the data, the concepts and theory developed beyond the scope of these questions and so there is a notable gap between these questions and the results discussed in the empirical chapters that follow:

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<sup>13</sup> It is also not possible for a research student to commence fieldwork or secure funding without having first conducted a fairly extensive literature review and formed a 'sound' research proposal (the absence of which would be a Glaserian/Classic approach).

- What perceptions shape and influence young middle-class Indians' desire to seek international education?
  - What are the perceived risks and benefits associated with international education?
  - What is the role of education agents as intermediaries, and how do they shape perceptions of international education and risk?
  - How does international education overlap with and/or reinforce other markers of class in India?

I developed these questions in consultation with scholarly literature on international student mobility, international education and class in India. I was further guided by my professional experiences working in the international education sector in Australia, and my personal interactions with many friends from India who had studied and/or migrated overseas. I then decided that Mumbai would be the field site in which these questions would be investigated. These questions were, however, intended as a guide rather than a set of hypotheses or queries for which I intended to find evidence to support (Kelle, 2007). In the process of simultaneously undertaking fieldwork and analysing the raw data I was collecting, the central research question evolved to focus more closely on the interplay between the (re)production of class status and international education in Mumbai.

## **EXPERIENCING THE FIELD**

I spent eighteen months in total conducting fieldwork in Mumbai. The field methods that I employed follow the grounded theory tradition and were relatively structured, including theoretical and purposive sampling of participants and semi-structured interviews. These data collection techniques were however not devoid of challenges brought about by my race, class, nationality and gender. In this section I discuss the methods that I used to conduct research in terms of recruitment, sampling and interviewing. I also reflect on my subjectivity as a researcher and ethical issues raised by conducting research in a postcolonial society. Following grounded theory methods, the research process can be broken down into three broad steps: recruitment and sampling; interviewing; and transcribing and analysis. It should be noted that, while the research is discussed here in 'steps', many of these processes overlapped and occurred simultaneously.

## **Recruitment and sampling**

In line with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) concept of theoretical sampling, the participant sample was initially purposive and then shifted to theoretical sampling. Three groups of formal participants were initially proposed, with a fourth (returned students) added during the fieldwork period after the first round of interviews and early stages of analysis had been conducted (explained below). This decision was spurred by several prospective students in the sample who had studied abroad previously, whose experiences seemed to inform their interview responses. I therefore decided to include returned students to gather a broader range of responses, which also marked the theoretical stage of sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It also became apparent during fieldwork that the perspectives of key industry informants (group five) would be valuable to thesis to understand the structures shaping student mobility beyond the perspectives of individual students and their families. The five groups are as follows:

1. *Prospective students*

Young people from Mumbai, aged 18-30, who were planning international education at the tertiary level. Participants in this group were living in Mumbai and unmarried. Prospective students could be embarking on a bachelor's degree, master's degree or PhD. Most were privately funding their degrees, though some were applying for scholarships.

2. *Parents of prospective students*

Parents of prospective students were approached to participate in the study.

3. *Education agents/counsellors*

Professionals working in the international education industry in Mumbai. Education agents/counsellors were interviewed with the purpose of providing personal insights from someone with a professional background in international education. They were not interviewed as formal representatives of their organisation.

4. *Returned students*

Young people aged 18-35 and raised in Mumbai who had returned to Mumbai in the last five years after completing their international education at the tertiary level.

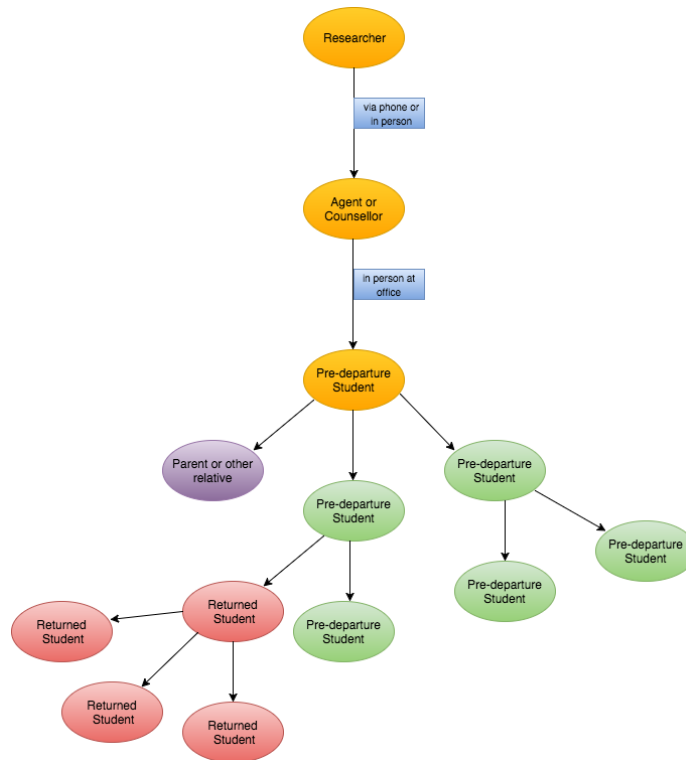
5. *Key informants*

Government and trade officials, bankers in the student loans department, academics and university representatives.

I chose to focus initially on prospective students and their families because there is a lack of attention to these groups in the ISM literature. For instance, Raghuram (2013) argues that more research needs to be conducted with prospective international students as not enough is understood about their aspirations, imaginaries and experiences prior to departing from the home country. Similarly, little is known about the role of parents and families in the pre-departure phase of student migration (Raghuram, 2013), or about the return migration experiences of international students (Collins et al., 2017), or about how the international education industry operates in Mumbai (Tuxen & Robertson, 2018) – all of which I also seek to address in this study.

Reflecting instructions in key grounded theory methods texts, participants were recruited in a number of ways (Charmaz, 2006). Several prospective students (8) and parents (2) were recruited using education agents and counsellors as a starting point, then snowball sampling was used to widen the sample. Returned students were all recruited via a snowball sampling method with either agents or counsellors or prospective students as the first point of contact. Prior to departing for fieldwork, I compiled a list of education agents/counsellors operating in Mumbai with an online presence using online local directories and search engines. I then contacted agents/counsellors directly via phone or in person at their business address as per the details they had listed online.

A purposive sampling approach was used to recruit education agents and counsellors. I assumed that agents and counsellors located in different parts of the city would offer fees and/or services that reflect the socio-economic status of those who tend to live in that area. For example, agents and counsellors located in South Mumbai would logically target the affluent families who live in the area, whereas agents and counsellors located in the suburbs would target the ‘new money’ in those areas. I first encountered potential participants at the office of an education agent or counsellor, with the permission of the agent/counsellor. After an introduction and explanation about the study, if the potential participant was willing to be interviewed, I would provide my contact details in order to arrange for the interview to take place. Snowball sampling was then employed after the interview by asking the participant to pass my contact details on to anyone in their network who may be interested in participating (see Figure 1 below).

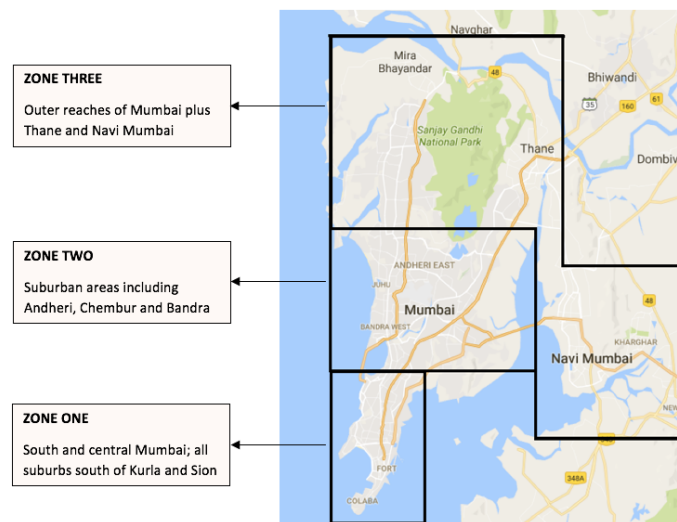


**Figure 1: Visualisation of example recruitment process**

I used purposive sampling to ensure that a range of views were reflected in the study (Barbour, 2001). The two student participant groups (prospective and returned) were purposively sampled using the same factors: gender, area of residence, community and religion. An even gender split was the only factor that was strictly adhered to when sampling student groups, while I used the other factors as a guide to ensure that I was cognisant of obtaining as wide a range of participants as possible. Gender was considered a particularly important feature of sampling because men and women have vastly different experiences, especially in a patrifocal society like India. Women in India are often understood to experience less mobility than their male counterparts (Still, 2011; Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Brosius, 2017; Ali, 2007; Karupiah, 2018), which is also reflected in international student numbers wherein 27% of India's outgoing students are female (UNESCO, 2010; also see Chapter 6), so I aimed to ensure that women's voices were equally represented in order to capture their experiences.

I also considered a participant's area of residence important because it potentially reflects the socio-economic status of the participant's family. Based on my prior knowledge of Mumbai as well as information collected during the pilot interviews, I drew

approximate lines on a Google city map and divided the city into three zones (see Figure 2 below). Zone One represents the ‘old money’ area of South Mumbai, Zone Two the ‘new money’ suburban areas, and Zone Three the ‘up and coming’ outer areas and satellite towns attached to Mumbai, connected by local public transport networks. I ultimately found that responses were generalisable across two zones rather than three: South Mumbai and the Suburbs. I discuss the empirical evidence relating to this divide in Chapter Four. Community, religion and/or caste can often be discerned upon learning an individual’s surname, however I rarely used these as a sampling method – the only exception was when I was reaching saturation and wanted to increase my chances of recording ‘outlier’ experiences (Charmaz, 2006).



**Figure 2: Map illustrating approximate zones used in purposive sampling (adapted from Google maps)**

While an even gender split was sought in both student participant groups, this was not applied in the other three participant groups as gender was not anticipated as a factor that would significantly influence information provided by participants, nor was it as easy to access the other groups so I was more restricted in being able to filter participants according to gender. As previously stated, agents and counsellors were purposively sampled according to the area in which their office is located. Parents were purposively sampled to some extent by virtue of the sampling process undertaken with students and the subsequent recruitment process, however, I do not believe this had any crucial impact on the data collected from the parent group. Key informants (Group 5) were located and

approached through personal and professional networks, usually involving an email introduction from a common acquaintance to which the participant responded if they were interested or willing to participate, from which a meeting or phone call would be arranged.

**Table 1: Overview of Student participant groups**

GROUP NAME	TOTAL	AGE RANGE	GENDER SPLIT	RELIGION	ZONE	COMMUNITY
Prospective Students	26	18-27 years	50/50	Hindu: 61% Jain: 4.5% Parsi: 7.5% Sikh: 7.5% Catholic: 7.5% Buddhist: 4.5% Atheist: 7.5%	1: 31% 2: 38% 3: 31%	Gujarati: 23% Punjabi: 19% Marwari: 3.8% Mangalorean: 3.8% South Indian: 11.5% Marathi: 15.4% North Indian: 3.8% Keralan: 3.8% Goan: 7.7% Zoroastrian: 7.7%
Returned Students	20	22-29 years	50/50	Hindu: 45% Jain: 25% Sindhi: 10% Catholic: 5% Buddhist: 5% Atheist: 10%	1: 65% 2: 35% 3: 0%	Gujarati: 30% Punjabi: 15.5% Marwari: 10% Sindhi: 15.5% South Indian: 5% Marathi: 5% North Indian: 5% Gujarati & Marathi: 5%

It must be noted that the data presented in Table 1 reflect information provided by participants based on their self-defined identities, sometimes resulting in a lack of precision. For instance, Sindh is a geographic region, not a religion. There are Sindhi Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, but many participants recorded only ‘Sindhi’ as their religious identity. Similarly, North India includes Punjab, but some participants explained that their families originate from multiple states in North India and hence were North Indian, while others were solely of Punjabi heritage. The same trend occurred in relation to South India, which includes the states of Kerala and Goa, and the city of Mangalore.

## Interviewing

Interviewing is an established and popular data collection method for grounded theory research (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). I utilised semi-structured interviews, guided



by open-ended questions and a brief paper-based survey at the end of the interview to collect additional basic demographic information (see Appendix A). The interview guides (see Appendix B) used to shape data collection reflected assumptions drawn from the literature on class in India, international student mobility and international education, and to a lesser degree from my personal and professional experiences (outlined above and in Chapter One). Questions were grouped around broad themes of aspiration, motivation, gender, risk, and class, with some small variations between the guides used for different participant groups.<sup>14</sup> Using a predetermined but not rigid series of questions allowed me to raise topics as organically as possible over the course of a conversation with the participant. Focusing on a narrower set of topics also helped to set boundaries within the research, reach saturation of categories, establish relationships between categories and refine emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews provided an ideal platform for participants to talk openly and at length about topics that I raised, whilst also allowing me to follow tangential topics raised by the participant. This method also allowed me to probe for clarity and explanation, which frequently revealed rich data. In the course of the current research, a total of 80 interviews were conducted. The majority took place at coffee shops around Mumbai (46), with others occurring in private offices (22) or homes (8), and some interviews with bank loan officers and academics took place via phone due to geographical distance (4). Before the interview commenced, each participant was asked to read the Participant Information sheet and sign the Consent Form (Appendices C and D). At the conclusion of each interview, student participants would complete a short paper-based survey (Appendix A). The interviews varied in length from 40 minutes to two hours and thirty-five minutes, with the average lasting approximately one hour.

The majority of interviews were informal in tone. I adopted a conversational approach, which was effective given that a majority of participants (46) were approximately my age. My age and conversational approach, and possibly my gender,

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<sup>14</sup> Key informants, Group 5, were interviewed without a guide because I was typically seeking specific information based on the participant's expertise. For example: information about how the student loan process works within an Indian bank, or information on how the Australian government promotes Australian education in India.

were important factors in being able to develop a rapport with participants. While building a rapport with participants is crucial in qualitative research in order to garner information, it is also fraught with ethical and moral dilemmas (for example, see seminal feminist texts Oakley, 1981; McRobbie, 1982; Hochschild, 1983; also, Duncombe & Jessop, 2012), which I will discuss further below.

### **Reflections on Conducting Research**

The issue of how researchers come to ‘know’ and possess ‘knowledge’ is a crucial epistemological question (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I argue that research practices are influenced by one’s tradition and cultural position (also see Ashworth, 1997). I therefore adopt a constructivist epistemology that understands knowledge as *constructed* by the researcher and participants alike (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). There *are* some objective truths – like gravity, or the occurrence of a tsunami, a war, and so forth – however the ‘truths’ that this research is concerned with are subjective because they evolve from reporting of personal experience and opinion. Charmaz (2000, 2006) makes a convincing case for adopting a constructivist epistemology, arguing that constructivist grounded theory recognises “the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meanings” (2000: 510). Following this assertion, Charmaz espouses that “we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (2006: 10, emphasis in original). The researcher therefore cannot be removed from the research and reporting processes. The researcher is responsible for ‘composing a story’ about the data or “an image of *a* reality, not *the* reality” (Charmaz, 2000: 523, emphasis in original). Narratives “[do] not simply unfold before the eyes of an objective viewer. The story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed” (2000: 510).

In relation to my own research and corresponding researcher subjectivity, race, gender and class are key axes of power when conducting qualitative research in a postcolonial, patrifocal society (Andersen & Collins, 2010). Whilst conducting and analysing interviews, a researcher must be mindful of their positionality, especially with regard to how social and historical considerations “mediate both the meanings of questions that are asked and how those questions are answered” (Dunbar, Rodriguez &

Parker, 2003: 132). It is impossible to neutralise the nuances of identity however it *is* possible to be cognisant of how one's identity as a researcher, but also as a person, may have influenced the study. Furthermore, the position of the socio-cultural 'other' (in this case, myself) is not fixed. Rather it is fluid and shifts according to a variety of contexts that one encounters when conducting fieldwork (Thapar-Björkert, 1999). My race, gender and class, combined with the fieldwork context, mean that remaining 'neutral' or keeping my 'self' out of the interviewing and analysis process is unrealistic – if not impossible (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

At the time of data collection I was a white, unmarried, middle-class Australian woman in my late twenties. All of these traits may be factors in how I was perceived by participants and how successful I was in recruiting participants – especially considering a large number of my participants were young men approximately my age (see Winchester, 1996). Many scholars have identified the possible advantages of being a woman interviewer, namely that 'femaleness' is less threatening and less 'official' than 'maleness' which can facilitate women researchers' greater access to participants' thoughts and opinions (Winchester, 1996; Wax, 1986; Smart, 1984; Schenk-Sandbergen, 1998; Bernard, 2011). However, in the Indian context, this can also mean that men dominate the interview (Thapar-Björkert, 1999; Miltiades, 2008), though I found that my gender, race, age and class were generally positive attributes that assisted in the collection of data.

As both a researcher and an individual, I am also acutely aware that I embody a historical and contemporary position of privilege, relative to a spectrum of global possibilities (Milner, 2007). However, while my privileged 'other' position accorded certain advantages, the power dynamic during interviews was typically very complex. Importantly, my race, age, class and gender often allowed space for reciprocity during the interviews (Oakley, 1981, 2016). For example, my race and nationality were generally advantageous in securing initial participants. When cold-calling education agents and counsellors to recruit them as participants, my Australian accent was an instant foot-in-the-door. Agents and counsellors would often agree to meet me, possibly because they perceived there may be some personal or professional advantage in knowing an

Australian in Mumbai or possibly because they were curious about an Australian doing research in India.

My gender was also, I believe, an advantage when conducting interviews (less so in the broader context of living in India, however). For example, the lingering male gaze is something that many women encounter in India on a daily basis and was often something that female participants and I bonded over, which was further facilitated by approximate age similarity. Additionally, the fact that I was in a long-term relationship with an Indian man from Mumbai (who I later married) was also a topic that frequently arose during the interviews because marriage was an area covered in almost all interviews. While I did not specifically enquire about what effect this fact may or may not have had, it was palpable that some participants perhaps treated this a token of my legitimacy as a resident in Mumbai. They did not seem to perceive me as a fly-in-fly-out expatriate but rather as someone who is invested in their culture and country in a way that many other ‘outsiders’ are not. As Dunbar et al. (2003) suggest, credentials that demonstrate an intimate knowledge of the society under study can inform participants’ views of the researcher.

The ways in which my class status may have impacted the research are less obvious than race and gender. In particular, my relatively ‘normal’ middle-class economic status in Australia was often obscured by my whiteness as well as my education level, nationality, mannerisms, way of dressing, and so forth. These forms of capital are, in many social contexts, more potent and visible than economic capital. For instance, I was particularly cognisant of my dress, which was a sensibility that I had developed when I lived in Mumbai previously and my work required me to engage with very different areas of the city. Participants explained that ‘Western’ clothes are a marker of upper-middle-class status in Mumbai, whereas the middle and lower classes tend to wear ‘Indian’ clothes (see also Gilbertson, 2014b). I would thus wear ‘Indian’ clothes when I interviewed participants in the outer reaches of Mumbai and ‘Western’ clothes when I was meeting elite South Mumbai-based participants. When I wore ‘Indian’ clothes participants would often comment on how ‘nice’ I looked in them – my dress did not go unnoticed. While wearing certain clothes can be read as a performance of class status (Gilbertson, 2014b), in my case it is possible that wearing Indian clothes also

communicated my participation in the 'local culture'. This relates to the previous point about how a researcher's demonstrable knowledge of the society and culture can impact participants' reactions, which I also hoped would help create rapport by narrowing the socio-cultural distance between myself as the researcher and participants.

My position as a cultural 'outsider' also potentially impacted the results of the study as well as the relationships that I was able to build with participants. Being an outsider allowed me to sometimes ask deliberately 'innocuous' or 'naïve' questions in response to comments made by participants, which allowed me to collect detailed data rather than relying on assumptions. My outsider positionality also meant that I could selectively reveal my existing knowledge of India according to the situation and the aims of the interview. Participants generally did not assume that I had intimate knowledge about their city or society, as they perhaps would have presumed of an 'insider' researcher. This potentially means that participants might have reflected more on implicit knowledge about factors such as class and caste.

My outsider positionality also impacted how participants related to me and how reciprocity was achieved in many of the interviews/relationships. For instance, for many participants I became a sounding board or a contact from which they could garner information about international education. Most of the agents in the sample contacted me at a later point to request information about Australian universities, while prospective students and their parents often sought my advice about their decisions around international education. I provided this advice to the best of my knowledge, accompanied with a disclaimer that these were based on my personal experiences and knowledge and that mine should be one of many opinions that an individual considers when making decisions about international education. Many of these relationships have also been ongoing, several of which have evolved into friendships. I have been cognisant, however, to ensure that my analysis is based on the information conveyed during interviews and not on subsequent occasions.

In addition to the ethical considerations raised in the above discussion of gender, race, class and power, there are several additional ethical considerations that ought to be noted. In line with the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines (NHMRC, 1999), the current research is guided by principles of confidentiality,

anonymity, privacy, informed consent, truthfulness, respect and care. The Australian National University's Human Research Ethics Committee further ensured that these principles were upheld throughout the research process by ensuring the design of the research project aligned to the NHMRC's guidelines (see Appendix E for documentation).

The principles of confidentiality and anonymity were of particular importance in the present study. Interviews with participants revealed personal information and opinions on sometimes-sensitive matters, such as caste and marriage. I have assigned a pseudonym to all participants to obscure their identity. Additionally, any unique information that may have revealed a participant's identity (such as the school they attended in Mumbai, or the name of the education agency/counsellor they work for), has been removed from the reported data or changed to ensure anonymity insofar as possible.

## **ANALYSING THE DATA**

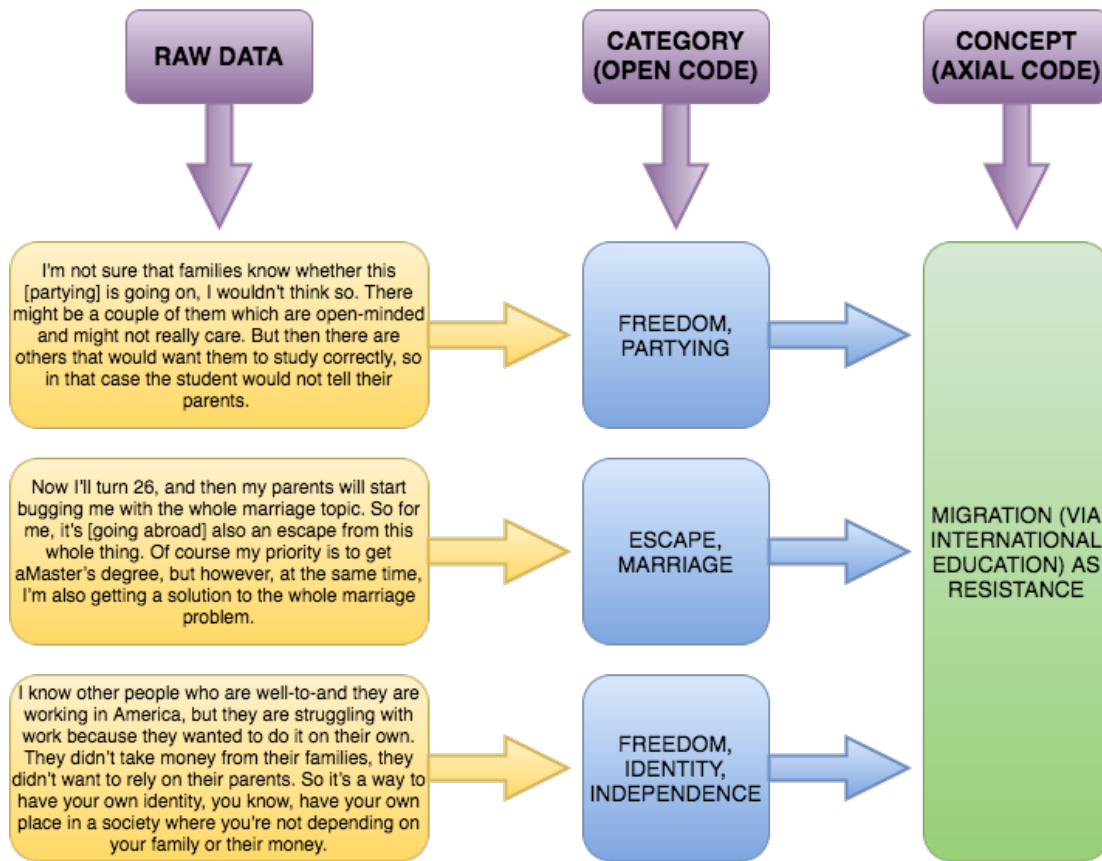
In adherence with the grounded theory tradition, I began analysing the data concurrent to conducting interviews with participants. This approach allowed the research topics to develop somewhat 'organically' and, importantly, for the dataset to become richer over time as I probed different points of interest at different stages of the research. This, I believe, resulted in a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the topic than had I conducted interviews and then analysed the data in a linear fashion.

With the permission of participants, interviews were audio recorded. Audio files were then transferred to a password protected laptop computer and labelled with the pseudonym assigned to the participant. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in a Word document. All identifying data were removed from the data during the transcription process. Memos (see Appendix F) were written during the transcription process, and notes were also made in the transcripts. Coding, following Strauss and Corbin (1994; also Corbin & Strauss, 2008), involved two overlapping early stages – open coding and axial coding – followed by the later stage of selective coding.

The initial, or 'open', round of coding involved studying the transcripts closely, by asking questions of the data and making comparisons, and identifying key anecdotes and phrases contained in the data (Charmaz, 2006; see also Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser,

1978; Kelle, 2007; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During the open coding stage I remained open-minded and coded with a 'brainstorming' approach to ensure that the data remained open to all possibilities and potentials (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data (anecdotes and/or phrases) were labelled with a category, or set of categories, that summarised the essence of the participant's statement (for an example, see Figure 3 below). The term 'category' is used to identify the initial, descriptive level of open coding (Bazely, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The second 'axial' stage of coding often occurred in tandem with open coding. The processes were not sequential, though axial coding could not occur without some degree of open coding having first occurred. Axial coding involved mining the initial categories to identify and develop concepts, and to identify relationships between categories (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). That is, to reassemble the data that were deconstructed during the initial phase of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The term 'concept' is used to identify this more abstract level of coding, in which themes and theory begin to be identified – or *emerge* from the data (Bazely, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Axial coding involved identifying relationships and commonalities between categories and developing concepts by interrogating these relationships and commonalities (see Figure 3). In this way, codes were deducted based on the information contained in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).



**Figure 3: Diagram illustrating example coding process**

Open and axial coding were continuously undertaken, and interviews continued to be conducted until I determined that conceptual saturation had occurred (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Saturation was deemed to have occurred once new interviews were not yielding new concepts or categories and the research process had therefore accounted for variation. At this point, data collection ceased and open/axial coding was finalised. Once data collection had been completed and the open and axial stages of coding were largely finished, the data were transferred to NVivo to allow for easier management (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Here, the concepts and categories developed during open and axial coding were recorded in NVivo. The process of re-recording categories and concepts acted as a pseudo third stage of coding. Through this process some categories and concepts were clarified, and occasionally, categories or concepts were added as a result of this clarification process.



## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have presented the methodology and methods that I employed in the current research. I designed this study using a combination of approaches from the grounded theory tradition(s), including developing a set of research questions based on existing knowledge and assumptions prior to entering the field; theoretical and purposive sampling of participants using a number of different recruitment techniques; semi-structured interviewing; and three rounds of coding conducted simultaneously to interviewing with the aim to develop a set of key themes and/or findings that arise from the data. In this chapter I have also reflected on the nature of the field in terms of Mumbai as a city (also discussed further in the next chapter) as well as my subjectivity and positionality as a researcher.

Before moving to the empirical chapters of this thesis, I wish to make a brief note on limitations and boundaries of the study. While this study strives to honestly reflect the experiences of participants, it is limited by the very nature of research. Qualitative research produces reams of rich data, however, a need to focus on the research question means that not all experiences and opinions can be unpacked within this thesis. A second limitation of this study lies in generalisability. The breadth and complexity of India means that ‘the Indian experience’ is multifaceted and irreducible.

While I have attempted to account for and be sensitive to variations and intricacies, I must acknowledge that I will not be able to cater to all perspectives. I was also unable to access Muslim student participants, despite this minority being a significant portion of Mumbai’s population. This was likely a shortfall resulting from snowball sampling, as well as a possibility that less Muslim students seek international education compared to other religions and communities due to their lower socio-economic status as a community (Khan, 2007; Basant, 2007). There is also a possibility that Muslims access international education via different channels or agents/counsellors to those that I was able to recruit to the study. Lastly, the present fieldwork site is incredibly fluid and complex, making it difficult to understand and anticipate. The current research aims to capture and explore complexities raised in the data. It does not, however, aim to present totalising understandings of India or Mumbai – such a task is folly. With these limitations in mind, the chapters that follow present empirical data collected from fieldwork in Mumbai.



# PART ONE

## IMAGINING AND PLANNING

### INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Hema resides in a leafy inner suburb of Mumbai, where the roads are well maintained, the schools are considered ‘good’ and apartment blocks are new. But the area is dotted with chemical factories that expel plumes of dark smoke and occasional bursts of flame. Locals sometimes quip that this suburb, Chembur, resembles a ‘middle-class *Mordor*’ — referring to the treacherous, volcanic and malevolent fictional region in the ‘Lord of the Rings’. I met Hema at her family home in Chembur, where she lives with her parents, younger brother and ailing paternal grandmother. Hema’s mother, Ahalya, answered the door in a floral housedress, her salt-and-pepper hair styled in a trendy bob. She greeted me with a confident handshake and flawless English, ushering me into their cluttered living room. Ahalya offered me chai, and we chatted briefly while Hema was finishing some paperwork. I learned that Ahalya and her husband lived in Qatar for almost ten years before returning to India to raise their children and that she is a high school teacher with a passion for English literature. Hema’s father is an engineer who works in telecommunications and often travels internationally for work, which has inspired several international family holidays within the Asian region. Her brother is enrolled in a nearby international school that opened several years ago, he also aspires to study abroad after completing the International Baccalaureate (IB).

When I sat down with Hema to chat about her international education plans, it quickly became apparent that she was highly aware of the role that class status plays in dictating her experiences in relation to her international education aspirations. Describing herself as belonging to a professional family from the suburbs, Hema explained that South Mumbai’s ‘rich townies’ have more money and therefore more options when it comes to international education. She stated that townies all have big businesses, so money is not a problem for them, which allows them to hire ‘as many counsellors as they like’ and not to worry about the expense of studying overseas. Hema’s family will need to take a loan to finance her degree, so she needs to ensure that she selects a course that will enable her to find a job overseas once she graduates. As Hema put it, she needs to ‘gain exposure’

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that will allow her to get a better job, which will then lead to a better lifestyle in the long-term. Hema also had to research her own international education without the assistance of an expensive education counsellor. Hema's mother challenged her at this point, arguing that if she wasn't able to figure out her international education options independently, then how would she cope once she lives alone overseas? After our interview, Hema contacted me a number of times to ask my opinion about various courses in Australia and resulting job prospects. I was unable to tell Hema what she wanted to hear, which was that she would certainly get a job once she graduates in order to repay her loan.

In the same day that I interviewed Hema I jumped in a cab and travelled to the leafy South Mumbai suburb of Malabar Hill, which is dotted with elaborate bungalows dating back to the British era. Malabar Hill is home to many of Mumbai's wealthiest residents, which is visible even on the street where luxury foreign-made cars are the norm. I arrived at Supriya's building, signed my name in the visitor's logbook and the white-gloved elevator attendant pressed the button to the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor. Another uniformed man answered the front door and ushered me into the spacious living room, which had uninterrupted views of the Arabian sea. Supriya soon emerged from her bedroom and asked her 'staff' to bring us a selection of exotic teas that her father had recently brought back from London, along with the macarons that her cousin had brought back from Paris.

When we settled into the interview, Supriya explained that studying overseas is a 'matter of course' for her as well as her entire social circle. Studying in India was not an option that many of her SoBo elite friends considered, unless they were 'super smart' and sought admission to an IIT<sup>15</sup>, but this was rare. When describing the process of selecting a college in the USA, Supriya detailed that there are several educational counsellors that 'everyone from town' engages and that these counsellors will guide students and their families, even writing application essays for students who are willing to pay extra. Supriya told me that one of the main reasons that she wants to go abroad, aside from it being expected within her social circles, is to gain 'exposure'. She spoke at length about

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<sup>15</sup> The Indian Institute of Technology, well known in India as IIT, is possibly the most prestigious institute to graduate from in India. Education counsellors often told me that getting into an IIT was harder than gaining admission to an Ivy League school, which is reflected statistically. In 2017 less than 5% of students who applied to IIT were successful (Ratrey, 2017; Bhandary, 2017), which is similar to Harvard's admission rate which declined to below 5% for the first time in 2018 (Glatter, 2018).

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the personal growth that she is anticipating, the independence at her fingertips, and the ‘foreign stamp’ that she will acquire by being ‘exposed’ to ‘life over there’. For Supriya, spending time overseas was a crucial component of her transition to adulthood, which was typical of the SoBo elite trajectory.

In the three empirical chapters that follow, I draw on interview data to establish the detailed empirical context and foundational arguments of the thesis by focusing on the pre-departure phase of international student mobility. In Chapter Four I discuss how participants talked about class in Mumbai and how they drew lines of distinction between themselves and others. Here, I detail the localised micro-categories of class – who I am calling the SoBo elite and suburban strivers – that are a central component in the analysis that I present throughout this thesis. In Chapter Five I turn to the international education industry and the education agents and counsellors that operate within this field. I seek to understand in what ways localised micro-categories of class are embedded in the services of education agents and counsellors, and what impact this might have on prospective international students from various class backgrounds. Finally, in Chapter Six I conceptualise the local notion of ‘exposure’ as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital, which took on different meanings or value according to an individual’s localised micro-category of class. Suburban strivers valued ‘gaining exposure’ as a route to upward socio-economic mobility via enhanced career prospects, while SoBo elites sought to self-actualise and suggested that the symbolic value of ‘exposure’ would be most potent upon their return to India.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **‘IT’S A TRICKY THING TO CLASS YOURSELF’:**

### **CONSTRUCTING LOCALISED MICRO-CATEGORIES OF CLASS**

“It’s a tricky thing to class yourself. ... There’s the poor people and then there’s everyone else, so how do you calculate that?”

– Zeenia, female, 23, SoBo elite prospective student

The imagination, formation and performance of class in contemporary India is a contested site, from academia to popular media, Bollywood to politics. Ashish Shakya, a popular Indian comedian, quipped in a 2015 *Hindustan Times* opinion piece that everyone in India – rich or poor – *likes* to identify as middle-class. Shakya’s conclusion: “If your family has migrated completely from [using] bars of soap to shower gels, then you’re not middle-class anymore.” His comic observation reflects two important themes that appeared consistently within the data collected in this study. Namely, blurriness around who is included and excluded in the middle class, and the significance of seemingly inane class markers – such as shower gel versus soap – in (re)producing class distinction.

In this study, respondents used inconsistent terms to describe class status. For instance, some used the more conventional lower, middle and upper class labels. Several others explained an elaborate nine-tiered system of classification ranging from lower-lower, middle-lower, upper-lower, lower-middle, middle-middle, upper-middle, lower-upper, middle-upper to upper-upper class. Given that individuals inherit and accumulate different levels of capital and that certain forms of capital are more potent than others (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986), it is unsurprising that class boundaries are difficult, if not impossible, to define. Despite this fuzziness, the vast majority of participants situated themselves as upper-middle class. Yet, the participants as a group were clearly not homogeneously ‘upper-middle class’. As I argue in this thesis, the SoBo elite are in a number of ways considerably more privileged than suburban strivers.

This left me in a challenging position as a researcher – how does one make sense of ostensibly different class groups when participants use uniform language to describe

themselves as ‘upper-middle class’? Based on my observations around the differing levels of capital that participants from the suburbs and from South Mumbai possess, in this chapter I develop the notion of ‘localised micro-categories of class’ and define the categories of concern to this thesis as the ‘SoBo elite’ and ‘suburban strivers’. These labels were also informed by participants’ descriptions of class distinction, detailed throughout this chapter, so I think that participants would find these labels convincing – even if they did not explicitly define themselves as such. As discussed in the introductory chapter, SoBo elites typically live without a budget and would be considered elite in any context, which is why I situate this group as elite rather than using their self-assigned label of upper-middle class. Suburban strivers, on the other hand, tend to meet conventional notions of the (upper-)middle class because their lifestyles are comfortable but have limits (Gilbertson, 2017a). I therefore identify this group as upper-middle class. Despite these objective differences in levels of capital, the boundaries between these class groups are not always sharp.

In this chapter I unpack participants’ discussion around class identities, exploring how participants marked, constructed and imagined ‘localised micro-categories of class’ in Mumbai, as well as the often-ambiguous role of caste in the formation and performance of class identities. I also explore how participants distanced themselves from classed Others. For participants in this study, international education is a marker of status that is experienced differently according to one’s localised class status. In later chapters I argue that these localised micro-categories of class play a significant role in how international education is imagined and experienced by participants in Mumbai. Attending to these localised class granularities presents a novel approach to thinking about international students, who – as I have discussed in Chapters One and Two – tend to be framed as belonging to ‘the middle’ but without detailed discussion of what this actually means or why it matters, which I seek to address in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

## **CLASS AS RELATIONAL**

The idea of class as relational is not new. Many studies of class in India have observed that individuals position themselves in relation to others above and below (Säävälä, 2003; Jeffrey, 2010; Sancho, 2015; Gilbertson, 2017a; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2008; Fernandes & Heller, 2006; and for empirical examples outside India see



Khan, 2011; Liechty, 2003). Adopting a relational approach to class in her study of class in Madurai, Sara Dickey (2016) explains that class systems are (re)produced by pre-existing assumptions about different categories of people, which are used to rationalise how different types of people live and are treated. In Nepal, Mark Liechty similarly observes a “middle class project to construct itself in *opposition* to its class others, above and below” (2003: 15, emphasis in original). In this thesis I thus approach class projects as a pursuit of creating difference between oneself and a perceived Other, through which status and privilege can be asserted and/or (re)produced.

Identifying the class of others was central to how participants understood their position within Mumbai’s class hierarchy. Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 479) argued that “social identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat.” Studies of class in India have described how middle-class individuals distance themselves from the poor, typically by producing class difference on the basis of perceptions of dress, language, consumption, hygiene, manners, sophistication, education and so on (Dickey, 2000, 2016; Frøystad, 2005, 2006; Jeffrey, 2010). As Fernandes and Heller (2006) argue, the creation of difference by constructing unequal sociocultural identities forms an essential part of the process of middle-class formation, wherein distancing from those underneath is crucial to maintaining a middle-class identity.

Unlike the majority of studies which find that difference is created in relation to those *below*, Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2008) noted that their middle-class participants framed their lifestyles as ‘normal’ – though they were relatively privileged – and sought to distance themselves from the very wealthy rather than from the poor (see also Gilbertson, 2017a; Jeffrey, 2010). Similarly, in the present study respondents consistently sought to distance themselves from others above them in Mumbai’s class hierarchy, rather than from those below, perhaps because they understood that their access to capital placed them in the upper echelons of class status but they feared association with the excesses of elitism (discussed further below). It is also possible that participants took their socio-economic distance from the poor for granted and thus did not see value in asserting this difference. The poor and lower-middle class were rarely mentioned by participants,

whereas the exemplar of the super-elite, the Ambani family (described below) were cited in a majority of interviews.

To gain insight into the economic capital that participants' families had accumulated, as part of a post-interview survey<sup>16</sup> I asked student participants their approximate annual household income. While almost all students (prospective and returned) did not know their annual family income, most hazarded a guess. The estimated annual incomes of student participants identifying as upper-middle class ranged from US\$7500-15,000 (Rs. 5-10 lakhs) to US\$300,000-750,000 (Rs. 2-5 crores).<sup>17</sup> These speculative incomes almost certainly contain gross underestimates. For instance, a family earning US\$7500 per annum is *highly* unlikely to allocate funds towards international education because most of this income would be used on daily living expenses in Mumbai. The discrepancies in these responses reinforce the necessity for developing my own class labels, whilst also raising questions about why the badge of upper-middleclassness is especially desirable for participants in this study.

A central idea that emerged from the data was the desirability of belonging to the middle, which is also a common theme in literature concerning the Indian middle class (Jeffrey, 2010; Upadhyay, 2016a; Gilbertson, 2017a), as well as other non-Western contexts including China (Zhang, 2010; Zhou, 2008; Hu, 2009), Nepal (Liechty, 2003) and Africa (Kroeker, O'Kane & Scharrer, 2018; Bach & Nallet, 2018; Southall, 2018). Sara Dickey (2012, 2016), for instance, observed that although her participants often did not possess adequate capital to conventionally locate them in the 'middle', they adopted this label to connote their sense of pride, 'enhanced self-control' and achievement. Dickey (2012: 560) explains that her respondents "emphasize the centrality of the middle class—at once a position of social visibility and worth, a stage on which to be judged by critical spectators, and a site that simultaneously avoids, buffers, and is caught between behavioural extremes—and this location contributes greatly to both the pleasures and the anxieties of being a middle-class person."

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<sup>16</sup> See appendix A for a copy of this survey.

<sup>17</sup> See appendix G for table detailing estimated incomes reported by student participants.

Dickey's findings are also reflected in this study, where several participants explained that belonging to the middle is desirable. For example, suburban striver prospective student Jason, 26, explained that most urban Indians belong to the middle class and have a standard set of financial goals that they aim to achieve in order to demarcate their belonging to the middle class:

We are all middle-class – only a very small section is upper class or poor, but otherwise we are all middle-class. ... The middle class is broken up into various things – like how comfortable you are, how easily you can get hired. ... When I say everybody is middle-class, I mean that they have aspirational values. They all want to own a house, own cars, have money in the bank. Everybody wants to unlock wealth. They want to have money and they want to be upper class. But there's only a very small section that you could actually call upper class – the middle class is very large.

The notion of aspiration that Jason evokes here is often associated with India's contemporary middle class(es) (for example, see Sancho, 2013; Talukdar & Linders, 2013; Vijayakumar, 2013; Uberoi, 2008; Brosius, 2010; Fernandes & Heller, 2006; Rao, 2010; Upadhy, 2016b). As Gilbertson (2017b: 20) writes, "middleclassness in India today is in many ways defined by future orientation and aspiration for mobility." In this sense, holding what Jason calls 'aspirational values' is perhaps as important to denoting belonging to the middle class as possessing certain consumer goods. However, his suggestion that Mumbai is a largely middle-class space is not reflected statistically. The World Bank (2012) estimates that one in five Indians are poor, and the Government of India's (2011) Census revealed that 46% of Mumbai's population lives in informal settlements, implying that a near-majority of the city lives below the poverty line. Informal settlements permeate Mumbai's landscape, yet participants consistently overlooked the poor and lower-middle class in their conceptualisations of class.

While the lower end of the class hierarchy was rarely mentioned by respondents, the elite were constantly drawn into comparative examples of what is *not* desirable. The upper class – often referred to as 'The Rich' by participants – were typically described as immoral, inconsiderate, exploitative, and excessive in their habits, culture and consumption. Divyak, 26, a returned student from a suburban striver family, suggested that many people identify as belonging to the middle class, but this is because being part of the elite is unfavourable:

Everyone is in this huge middle class – which is probably actually one hundred different classes in itself. How do you position yourself? You don't want to call yourself upper class, because calling yourself upper class in India is frowned upon, because then you're the one exploiting everyone else. No one ever calls themselves upper class for that reason. It's ok to be middle class. Everyone accepts the middle class. The middle class works hard and has earned what they have.

Divyak's comment highlights that the middle class is perceived as 'huge' by participants because belonging to the middle is desirable, and that there are multiple forms of middleclassness. Divyak implies that there is a certain amount of choice in how one defines their class status, suggesting that class boundaries are fluid and context-dependent. In other words, class labels are a reflection of how one wishes to represent oneself rather than one's actual access to economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital.

Distancing oneself from 'the rich' was a strong theme in the data. Many of the students in the study could, however, be considered part of India's 'rich'. As outlined in the Introduction, the majority of participants live in spacious apartments in well-to-do neighbourhoods in India's most expensive city (Mercer, 2016), they can afford international education, their parents have well-paid jobs or successful businesses, they attend private schools, their families take international holidays and are able to afford luxuries such as vehicles, dining out, and so on. However, because many participants had also come into contact with the very elite, usually at school, they understood their class identity and their own wealth and privilege as more 'ordinary'.

The Ambani family was consistently cited by respondents as the prime example of 'the rich'. Mukesh Ambani is India's richest man with an estimated net worth of US\$40.1 billion (Forbes, 2018). The Ambani family are renowned for luxurious excesses, including the recently constructed 60 storey-equivalent building, *Antilia*, that houses Mukesh Ambani, his wife and three children.<sup>18</sup> Slums are visible immediately below the towering home, leading Thomas Birtchnell (2016: 2352) to describe *Antilia* as "an island of wealth in a sea of poverty." However, it should be noted that the Ambanis are not necessarily representative of the top 1% wealth bracket in a purely quantitative sense, as participants suggested. Rather, according to various studies that use income-based

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<sup>18</sup> Though with the recent engagements of several of the Ambani children, this number will soon change.

measures of class in India, it is likely that almost all of the participants in this study are located statistically in ‘the 1%’ (see the Introduction of this thesis; see also Beinhocker, Farrell & Zainulbhai, 2007; Shukla & Purushothaman, 2008; Asian Development Bank, 2010; Meyer & Birdsall, 2012).

Tushar, 22, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, exemplified some of the common slippages that respondents experienced when engaging with the concept of class and attempting to locate themselves within these structures. Tushar initially situated himself as upper-middle class, but then changed his response upon further reflection:

T: I think it’s disingenuous for people like me to say that we’re upper-middle class, but it’s because we went to school with the Ambani kids and *that* is *upper* class. But at the same time, because [of my work] I know about income brackets and I know that a family like mine who lives at [South Mumbai] are easily in the top tier, they’re in the top 1% of the country, and that’s not upper-middle class anymore.

N: So then why did you say that you’re upper-middle class?

T: I don’t know. I actually don’t know. It’s just something you’ve always grown up saying. I guess you don’t want to be perceived as really, really rich. ... But at the same time, it’s context-dependent. In the context of India, yes definitely you’re upper class, but in your own circles there are people who are way, way, way richer than the likes of me.

N: If I asked you that question again now, would you change your answer?

T: Yeah, in the context of India or Bombay, yes I would – I would be upper class. It’s difficult to look at the whole context right away, but after you think about it, yeah, you’re definitely upper class.

These responses demonstrate that participants understand their class position in relation to those above them, who they also seek to distance themselves from. There is a desire to belong in the safety of the *relative* middle. Being part of ‘the rich’ involves greater accountability for one’s actions and behaviours and they have an unfavourable reputation for excess and immorality that individuals wish to distance themselves from.

This discourse around class identities as relational closely relates to discussion about class and morality that have been raised in a number of scholarly studies (Nisbett, 2007; De Neve, 2016; van Wessel, 2004; Donner, 2016; Gilbertson, 2014b; Dickey, 2012; Upadhy, 2016a; Murphy, 2011). Morality has been identified as a key factor in the

making of urban Indian middleclassness. In the postcolonial era, the Indian middle class became the “guardians of a normative morality that preserved the social fabric of the modernizing nation” (McGuire, 2011: 120; see also Chatterjee, 1993; Fernandes, 2000, 2006; Mankekar, 1999; Mazzarella, 2005). Today, this morality is often represented in issues pertaining to consumption. van Wessel (2004: 99) observed that her middle-class participants in Baroda chose to describe their lifestyles as ‘simple’, signifying a higher moral standing because they opted not to engage with ‘modern’ lifestyles that they associated with “consumption for the sake of enjoyment.” Nisbett (2007: 944) similarly found that the middle classes “are always more likely to moralize against the materialistic urges of the newly moneyed.” However, we know little about how India’s upper-middle class and elite experience consumption in general, nor in relation to education, which is crucial to understand if we are to gain a fuller picture of how class operates in urban India. This thesis seeks to provide some insight on this matter.

Lastly, several participants also characterised class as a relational project drawn along lines of regional community and religion (see also Dickey, 2016). Kunaal, 28, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, suggested that class identities can vary according to the socio-economic status of the religious community that an individual belongs to:

Being middle-class means different things in different communities. For example, being middle-class in the Muslim community, which is overall not as well-off as other communities, means that you might be lower-middle-class in a different community. And being middle-class in the Parsi community, which has a lot of wealth, might mean that you are actually upper-middle-class in another community.

Kunaal’s comment suggests that how participants identify class distinction in Mumbai is relational according to one’s religious community. Other studies in Mumbai have similarly demonstrated that Mumbai as an urban space is stratified along varied and intersecting axes (Anjaria, 2009; Nijman, 2006; Baud, 2015; Baud & Nainan, 2008; Chattaraj, 2012; Wissink, 2013; Zérah, 2007, 2008; McFarlane, 2013; Anand & Rademacher, 2011). These studies primarily highlight how Mumbai’s middle classes relate to and interact with issues around housing, infrastructure, neighbourhoods and public space, and how difference and distance is created and perpetuated through urban spaces. However, much like the research that I discussed in the Literature Review, this

body of literature has tended to assume that ‘middle-class’ is a relatively homogenous concept. In this thesis I similarly find that Mumbai is a stratified urban space wherein class statuses are made and reproduced partly according to local geographies, however, I also extend literatures on class in urban India/Mumbai by detailing how localised manifestations of class are heterogeneous and multifaceted. As the next section demonstrates, schools, residential locations and familial occupation all serve as measures to assess one’s class status in Mumbai, creating artificial divides within the city’s geography.

## **FOUNDATIONAL MARKERS OF CLASS IN MUMBAI**

When describing how class functions and/or is marked in Mumbai, respondents consistently drew spatio-temporal boundaries between the (old) South Mumbai area and the (new) suburbs. South Mumbai is characterised as the domain of those who possess ‘old money’ while those with ‘new money’ reside in the suburbs. Additionally, respondents consistently explained that whether one’s family engages in business or occupies salaried professional jobs is central to class identity. The corresponding assumption is that most business families possess more economic capital than most professional families. This binary approach to understanding local class identities, as described by participants, underpins later arguments and observations about localised micro-categories of class as they relate to international education. As mentioned in the Introduction, I understand these categories as significant social constructs that arise from how participants understand their class position in Mumbai, rather than absolute empirical realities. In this section I discuss the two fundamental components of class as described by participants: housing and occupation.

Housing is a universal marker of class. Where one can afford to live, whether one rents or owns, what kind of abode one inhabits, and how one adorns one’s home are all read by others as indicators of class status. These markers are indicative of economic status, but they are also signifiers of taste and distinction (Säävälä, 2003; see also Dickey, 2000). In Mumbai, Jan Nijman (2006) describes a ‘housing revolution’ that began in the 1990s resulting in new suburbs being quickly established to extend the city limits, with good quality high-rise construction and infrastructure – which I also described in the Introduction. Nijman suggests that a significant increase in middle-class and upper-

middle-class consumption underpins the eruption of housing construction. However, while improvements in housing can represent upward mobility for suburban strivers, the SoBo elite assert their superior forms of capital to fortify residential class boundaries between themselves and suburban strivers.

A majority of participants were unequivocal about the role of local geography in their assessment of class identities. For example, suburban striver prospective student Jignesh, 22, suggested that the best way to understand class in Mumbai is to draw relationships between ‘societies’ and geographical areas, which he jotted down on a piece of paper as follows:

Let's divide Mumbai into three societies:

1. The ultra-rich and rich;
2. The upper-middle class;
3. The lower-middle class.

Section one is South Bombay, section two is the suburban areas – Santacruz, Khar, Bandra – and section three is Andheri and beyond. This is how you can see the classes in Mumbai.

Similar divisions were outlined by many other participants, including those interviews conducted during the pilot phase of the research, which is why this divide is also reflected in the sampling of participants (detailed in Chapter Three). While these divisions on the basis of economic capital are not strictly bounded – wealthy people also live in the suburbs and less wealthy people live in South Mumbai – the South Mumbai/Suburban dichotomy is important to understand how class operates in Mumbai because additional socio-cultural expectations or class markers are attached to where one resides.

Residents of South Mumbai understood that the location of their home led others to assume that they were among Mumbai’s wealthiest residents and many of them were aware of the criticisms of ‘townies’ and their attitudes, spending habits and leisure activities. Returned student Nimit, 25, one of the few participants who identified as belonging to the upper class, explained that South Mumbai is a pleasant location in which to reside but that it comes with an inescapable and often negative label of elitism, which he had personally experienced:



You have the 1% crowd living in South Bombay, where the best properties are. ... The infrastructure is better, the roads are better, the kind of crowd, the access, the [country] clubs, everything is here. The [Maharashtrian] government is still here in South Mumbai. I think that *does* create this sense that, 'Oh you're the 1% and then there's the rest of us, and *all of you* have your heads stuck up some orifice'.

Students residing in South Mumbai often resented the assumptions they felt their peers made about them on the basis of their address.

However, SoBo elites also regularly returned fire, suggesting that students from the suburbs were sometimes materially wealthy but lacked the cosmopolitan cultural capital that is thought to distinguish South Mumbai residents from others in Mumbai. For example, returned SoBo elite student Kunaal, 28, contended that where one 'decides' to live reflects their level of 'sophistication':

Geography is huge. Geography has to do with wealth, but more than anything it has to do with antiquity. Are you an old Bombay resident, or not? If you live in South Bombay, it's not about the fact that your residence cost that much, it's more about that you are willing to pay that much and that you have the means to, or that it *matters* to you. Being part of a cosmopolitan neighbourhood matters to you ... I'll give you an example: there are people who are immensely wealthy who live in [suburban] Vile Parle, with much more money than most of the families in South Bombay. But they're not 'modern' or 'sophisticated' enough to recognise and put the money where their mouth is. ... You're wealthy, but you're not sophisticated. So, South Bombay is the intersection of sophistication and wealth. But you can also be sophisticated without being wealthy.

Kunaal's assertion that one can be sophisticated without being wealthy, on the basis of where they live, subverts the importance of possessing economic capital to denote class status. In Kunaal's understanding, class is informed by cosmopolitan cultural capital that he assumes is accumulated over generations, conveyed via his mention of 'antiquity'. Further, his assumption that people have a 'choice' in where they live is also an indicator of elite membership – choice is only possible when one possesses the economic capital to facilitate options (Jeffrey, 2010; Appadurai, 2004). The geographical divides that participants constructed between South Mumbai and the Suburbs are therefore reflective of boundaries as well as intersections between economic capital and cosmopolitan cultural capital possessed by the city's upper-middle class and elite. Geographic location operated as a form of cultural capital that participants used to denote levels of taste, as well as the amount of economic capital that a family possesses.

A second binary that frequently accompanied discussion of the South Mumbai/Suburbs divide was whether an individual belongs to a 'business family' or a 'professional family'.<sup>19</sup> Specifically, SoBo elites were imagined to belong to business families with several generations of successful trading or manufacturing of goods, while suburban strivers were viewed as professional families who have benefitted from greater availability of salaried professional jobs since economic liberalisation in the early 1990s (see also Fernandes, 2006).

The importance of profession in producing class status has been identified in a number of studies that consider class in India, often characterised as the 'old' and 'new' middle classes (Säävälä, 2003; Fernandes, 2000, 2006; Nijman, 2006; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2008; Jeffrey, 2010). As discussed in Chapter Two, scholars typically recognise the 'old' elite as those who were connected to the anticolonial struggle and subsequent administration of India, and whose families held civil service (IAS) jobs prior to the liberalisation of India in the 1990s (Bhatt et al., 2010: 129). The constitution of the 'new' middle class(es) is contested (Fernandes & Heller, 2006; Fernandes, 2006), however, they are generally accepted to be those who have experienced upward mobility as a result of advancements in India's economy in the post-colonial period, primarily during the 1990s. They tend to occupy salaried positions in industries such as information technology or multinational corporations, or run small-to-medium enterprises made possible by a booming economy (Upadhyay, 2011, 2016a; Radhakrishnan, 2011; Fernandes, 2006). The 'new middle class' are thought to possess high economic capital but low cultural capital, while the 'old elite' are those who have high cultural capital but low economic capital.

The data presented in this study, however, presents a different image of the old versus new in the Mumbai context, though the old money versus new money contrast remains significant.<sup>20</sup> Respondents suggested that business families residing in South

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<sup>19</sup> Note that although 'family' was the word used by most participants, we are actually talking about the occupation of fathers and grandfathers.

<sup>20</sup> Identifying definitively whether this particular example of old versus new is a construction specific to the Mumbai context is beyond the scope of this study. All cities in India have old business families and it is likely that their absence from other studies reflects the fact that most research has focused on the middle classes rather than the elite. However, these distinctions may also be more prominent in Mumbai because the city, as a port city, has long been a prominent financial and trading hub, attracting migrants from all over India (Subramanian, 2012; Tumber, 2012; Markovits, 1995). Anecdotally, residents of Mumbai suggest that descendants from

Mumbai – the SoBo elite – represented the city’s old elite because they had accumulated significant amounts of economic *and* cultural capital over several generations of successful business activities. That is, they possess high economic capital as well as high (cosmopolitan) cultural capital. On the other hand, professional families who had experienced relatively recent upward mobility – the suburban strivers – represented Mumbai’s new money. So, we have the SoBo elite who possess high levels of all forms of capital, and the suburban strivers who have lower stores of capital in all respects compared to the SoBo elite.

Participants assumed that suburban strivers, on the whole, were less wealthy than business families and their lack of inherited wealth also denoted lower cultural sophistication. Bourdieu (1986) emphasises that time is crucial to the accumulation of capital, explaining that capital “takes times to accumulate” and that “time free from economic necessity” is a precondition for the acquisition of capital (1986: 242, 246). In this empirical context, suburban strivers have accumulated capital over a much shorter timespan compared to the SoBo elite, which appears to negatively impact how their capital is perceived and valued by others, especially in relation to cosmopolitan cultural capital (discussed further in Chapters Six and Seven). On the other hand, participants explained that the children (sons, in particular) of business families are groomed to take over family businesses which have often been operating successfully for many decades. The inheritance of business interests between generations also confers intergenerational transfer of capital. For Bourdieu, as Kenway (2017: 39) observes, “cultural and social capital are slowly and imperceptibly accrued and accreted over extended time but in one place.” This thesis concurs that capital accumulated over time is important, but argues that, in the context of Mumbai’s elite, social and cultural capital accumulated in one place tends to have less value than capital acquired via transnational mobility (see also Ong, 1999; the latter point is discussed further in Chapters Two and Six). Participants placed particular emphasis on the accumulation of cosmopolitan cultural capital via transnational mobility, as I will also discuss in later chapters. In terms of capital accumulated over time,

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business and trader communities (Marwaris, Gujaratis, Sindhis and Parsis – though the latter has been a well-established community in Mumbai since the 1660s [for a history of Mumbai’s Parsi community, see Palsetia, 2001; David, 1973]), founded successful businesses in Mumbai during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of which are the ‘family businesses’ discussed in this thesis.

the occupation of key breadwinners within the family tended to serve as a marker for how much capital an individual was likely to possess and for how long they had possessed it.

When students were asked how they situated themselves in Mumbai's class hierarchy, many respondents initially used money as the core measure of class. However, most did not know their family's income. The main breadwinner's occupation – typically the male head-of-household – then tended to function as a proxy for presumed economic capital. For example, prospective student from a suburban striver family, Rustom, 18, explained how he situates himself and therefore his family based on occupation rather than income:

My father won't ever show me the finances, so I don't know what class we are based on income. But he has a high position, though he doesn't show it much. The upper-middle class is professional families who have good incomes. That's where we fit in. ... The upper-upper would be the Ambanis. Then the upper would be, like, one of those politicians who have a lot of money, CEOs and people who have their own businesses. Then the middle class would be people who work in companies, like, employees.

Rustom describes a gradation of class differentiated by occupation and presumed income: the upper-upper (the Ambanis), the upper (business families), the upper-middle (higher salaried positions) and the middle class (lower salaried positions). Many participants described a very similar hierarchy. However, as mentioned previously, these assessments are relative to the immediate surrounds of individual participants. The majority of respondents in this study belong to India's relative elite, so I argue that these descriptions of different statuses are actually reflective of perceptions of granular, rather than relatively homogenous, class identities within relatively elite segments of urban Indian society.

Highlighting this granularity, several participants described difference between business families on the basis of which regional community they belong to. Marwari and Gujarati communities were most often mentioned by respondents, with Sindhis and Parsis making occasional cameos (though the latter, with the exception of the Tata family<sup>21</sup>, was usually seen as an example of historical rather than contemporary wealth). For instance,

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<sup>21</sup> The Tata family are prominent industrialists. They made their fortune in the steel industry and run a large number of charitable trusts.

Anirudh, 26, a SoBo elite returned student, explained his understanding of Mumbai's class hierarchy according to familial occupation, wealth, community and conservatism. His response also demonstrates that it can be problematic to assign broad labels to class groups in Mumbai. Anirudh struggles to neatly describe who belongs to which class group, despite being able to label these hypothetical groups:

The upper class has so much money that it has to be your parents, probably your grandparents. So, it's not yours. You have a tremendous amount of inherited wealth from the family business. ... Within upper class there is also, uh, let's say upper-upper, they have an *incredible* amount of wealth and all of that. Then there's the upper class, which has a lot of money but it's more conservative because they follow their Marwari or Gujarati traditions. ... By global standards they would still be a very wealthy person, but culturally they're not as sophisticated. ... Then there's the upper-middle class, by virtue of salary. That's me. That's the professional upper class.

If we dissect Anirudh's comment there are two groups that emerge which, I contend, are reflected in the notion of localised micro-categories of class. First, there is the group that Anirudh describes as both the 'upper-upper' and 'upper class'. These are the 'old' business families with large stores of inherited capital, which I am calling the SoBo elite. These families are often ethnically Marwari and Gujarati, although there are also many SoBo elite families from other ethnic and religious backgrounds. Second, there is the 'professional upper class', in which Anirudh situates himself as a well-paid salaried professional working for a large Multinational Corporation (MNC). Anirudh is perhaps in a unique position to make these class assessments, as he comes from a professional family that has been extremely successful and he grew up in South Mumbai and attended school along with children from business families.

Ultimately, Anirudh clarified his thoughts and arrived at the conclusion that there are two distinct upper-middle classes, the professional and the business, that are equal in terms of economic capital but are 'very different' in the amount and type of (cosmopolitan) cultural and social capital that they accumulate and display:

I would say there is a professional upper-middle class and a business family upper-middle class. In terms of class distinctions – the way they live and the way they do things – those are two very different groups. Very different. Different freedoms, different goals *entirely*, different way of raising children, different culture, different values, everything. You might have the same level of income, but they belong to different classes.

Although Anirudh positions these groups as upper-middle class, I argue throughout this thesis that the gap between capital accrued by the SoBo elite and suburban strivers (both in terms of quantity and quality, as well as the timespan of acquisition) is broad enough to position them in different class groups (see also Chapter One). The differences that Anirudh mentions – freedoms, goals, values, culture, ways of raising children – highlights that income is not the key measure of class or *classiness*. For the SoBo elite, the ability to embody progressive or ‘modern’ values and attitudes (i.e. embodied cultural capital) is more important than economic capital because this is what defines their superiority.

Anirudh’s comment summarises a core distinction that many participants sought to make when articulating class difference in Mumbai: that money establishes access to education and other products/experiences, but decisions made around these purchases that reflect levels of taste are dictated by familial culture, which is informed by occupation, inherited versus new wealth, regional or religious community, area of residence, and so forth. It is these supposed taste-related decisions and their visible outcomes, as well as money, that form the basis of class distinction. Increased levels of wealth cross the city potentially flatten former class boundaries that existed simply on the basis of who could afford to access international education. However, as this thesis demonstrates, other modes of distinction – especially cosmopolitan cultural capital – usurp economic capital to ensure that class status is reproduced and boundaries are maintained between the elite and the upper-middle class as the latter increasingly gains access to international education. However, we must also understand the ways in which both of these localised micro-categories of class distinguish themselves from other, lower class groups in Mumbai.

## **MORE THAN MONEY**

Class difference can be made on the basis of concrete disparities in material wealth, as well as seemingly arbitrary differences in consumption practices and comportment. Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of distinction, described in Chapter Two, provides a useful concept to understand how individuals organise their perceptions of social status, which is observed via markers including dress, speech, dispositions, tastes and so forth. Of particular importance when creating class difference is an individual’s ability to demonstrate the possession of cultural capital, especially in the embodied and

cosmopolitan forms. In a Bourdieusian (1986) sense, members of the dominant social group use their cultural capital to demonstrate ‘cultural competence’ that distinguishes them on the basis of the ‘scarce cultural capital’ that only the elite group possesses. Chan and Goldthorpe (2010: 4) similarly argue that the dominant group “demonstrate and confirm the superiority of their own lifestyle over those of other classes by arrogating to it cultural forms that they can represent as ‘canonical’, ‘legitimate’ or otherwise ‘distinguished’ – while maintaining ‘aesthetic distance’ from other forms deemed to be inferior.”

In this study, taste and sophistication – conveyed via cosmopolitanism – were also the hallmarks of cultural ‘superiority’, particularly when participants were talking about the middle class, but also when the SoBo elite spoke about the suburban strivers. This section explores the two most common markers of class identified by participants that they perceived as playing a central role in marking class difference: consumerism and a willingness to spend, and spoken language. These markers – access to money and fluency in standard English – are also fundamental factors that allow the upper-middle class and elite to obtain an international education. This section highlights strategies of distinction employed by the upper-middle class and elite (combined as the ‘relatively elite’) to create cultural distance between themselves and others, both above and below in Mumbai’s class hierarchy.

### **The Willingness to Spend**

Consumption choices was one of the most common markers that respondents used to distinguish between class groups. As discussed in Chapter Two, Bourdieu (1986) argued that economic capital is the basis of all other forms of capital. Without economic capital, the accumulation of other capital is very difficult or impossible. Following Bourdieu, I argue that spending power denotes class status and creates spaces of exclusivity that can only be accessed with sufficient economic capital (international education is one such field). However, consumption is about more than money. It also conveys an individual’s priorities and tastes, which can foster class alignments or divergences. This section details how the ‘willingness to spend’, within certain limits, denotes and delimits class status.

Scholars have demonstrated that consumption practices are crucial in the making of class groups. Fernandes (2006: xxxi) contends that the new middle classes do not consume in response to increased income levels or advertising images, but rather as a result of complex interactions between “subjective and objective dimensions of group formation.” Extending this view, Brosius (2010) argues that class membership is formed largely on the basis of *knowing* how to consume and how to perform appropriate dispositions and lifestyles that correspond to middleclassness. In this sense, consumption is about much more than purchasing goods. It is about belonging, or not belonging, to a particular group that is defined by their (ir)responsible consumption, behaviours and aspirations (Liechty, 2003; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2008; Nisbett, 2007; Upadhy, 2016a). This is also true of the upper-middle class and elite people that I focus on in this study. By discussing the relatively elite (i.e. upper-middle class and elite), who have been largely overlooked in literature on class in India, I add new empirical evidence to these studies of middleclassness.

Data collected in this study reflects the literature on middleclassness in urban India. The amount one spends, what they spend it on, and how often they spend it were the categories typically used by participants to define class boundaries. They perceived that spending habits are closely tied to notions of taste and sophistication, as well as morality. Respondents were often quick to criticise others, both above and below, who did not consume in ways they considered appropriate. As outlined earlier in this chapter, participants consistently defined their own class status by distancing themselves from the very elite. However, as I have previously argued, all the participants in this study are relatively elite, yet there was a persistent desire to explain that ‘*we are not like them*’. In my interview with Shriya, an 18-year-old suburban striver from a family of medical doctors, explained her perception that the upper class spends money unnecessarily whereas her upper-middle class family are sensible consumers:

Upper-class people, like Ambani and all, they have 13 storey buildings for a family of four! That is insane! It’s so stupid! ... They splurge, completely. They show off. I think we are smart in the way we spend. I think that’s how I differentiate between the upper and the upper-middle. We have the money to spend, but we limit ourselves to smart ways of spending it. The upper class have far too much money for their own good. They don’t know what to do with it, so they spend it! I mean, donate it to charity why don’t you. Do something constructive!



Drawing distinction between measured, sensible ways of spending money and excessive, uncontrolled consumerism was perceived by participants as a key marker of difference between themselves and the very elite, suggesting that there are collective notions of performing a class identity ‘within the limits’ (Gilbertson, 2017a).

While participants stated that one’s willingness to spend must occur within certain limits, they equally asserted that there were minimum spending requirements that separated them from the middle class. For example, Navita, 26, a suburban striver prospective student, ridiculed middle-class people for having money but being unwilling to spend it:

You know you're middle-class when you buy a new car and you don't take the plastic off the seats. You know you're middle-class when you don't buy a rag to wipe the floor, but you use your old clothes to wipe the floor. ... I think they think that it will save them money or something like that. A rag for wiping the floor is like 60 rupees, which can go for three months. I don't know how much money you can save on that! [laughs] ... I would categorise classes on the capability of spending money. No, on the *willingness* to spend! Like, I'm willing to buy a mop and they're not, even though we both can afford the mop.

Criticism of the middle class often centred on the way that they consume. Participants suggested that the middle class (i.e. those immediately below them in Mumbai’s wider class hierarchy) have adequate financial resources but they are anxious about spending money, which both SoBo elite and suburban striver respondents perceived as their lacking economic confidence as well as cultural sophistication.

In relation to consumption, the SoBo elite and suburban strivers both located themselves in the space between the very elite and the middle class. Their wealth security allows them to consume with conviction and assert their accumulated (cosmopolitan) cultural capital. This narrative is, however, countered by dominant themes in literature concerning consumption practices, which find that the middle class take a moral stand against perceived materialism, and in doing so construct a classed identity based on high morality and (Hindu) virtue though not-so-high economic capital (van Wessel, 2004; Brosius, 2010; see also Parameswaran, 2004). And so, a ‘willingness to spend’ is typically understood as a criticism aimed at the rich (cf. Gilbertson, 2017a). However, participants also used their willingness to spend as a positive marker of distinction that defines their

superiority in Mumbai's class hierarchy. This discrepancy between the literature and my data is possibly because the elite are less often studied, so relatively little is known about their lived experiences. Furthermore, for individuals possessing ample economic capital, a 'willingness to spend' justifies 'big' purchases – such as international education.

### **Spoken Language**

Linguistic cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) – primarily in its spoken form – is a highly visible marker of status in India. The language that one speaks and how they speak it (speed, accent, vocabulary, volume, etc.) is observed by others and used to form judgements about class status (Chidsey, 2018). The way that one speaks is also recognised by others as a 'natural' skill, which obscures the work that goes into the acquisition of language fluency (Khan, 2011). As Malhotra (2018) argues, the ability to speak 'good English' is central to the performance of contemporary urban Indian middle-class identities. Scholars have also noted that the 'new' middle classes view the ability to speak English as a key pathway to achieving upward socio-economic mobility (Fernandes & Heller, 2006; Upadhyay, 2016a; Jeffrey, 2010; Murphy, 2011; Jayadeva, 2018; Malhotra, 2018), which poses a potential threat to the position of the existing middle classes. Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2008: 148) argue that, "for the middle classes, English is a resource that must be defended and maintained at all costs." However, participants in the present study did not appear to feel threatened by the rise of English language proficiency among the middle classes, perhaps because their position in Mumbai's class hierarchy is relatively secure. Participants were, however, still aware of how and what language other class groups typically speak. Respondents also used more nuanced assessments of English proficiency and usage to distinguish between the SoBo elite and suburban strivers, despite that both groups speak standard global English. This section discusses both how participants positioned their own English in relation to others of different (lower) classes as well as how distinction is made within the relatively elite.

In order to frame the following discussion, I turn to Braj Kachru's (1985; see also 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1996) notion of three 'concentric circles of English', which he uses to explain how different countries use and speak English. The 'inner circle' describes countries where English is spoken as the primary language, including the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These countries, according to Kachru (1985), are

‘norm-providing’ in the sense that these Englishes are accepted as ‘model’ varieties because they are spoken by native speakers. The ‘outer circle’ defines countries where English is one of two or more official languages and is used in a variety of functions. Most of these countries are former British colonies, including India, Malaysia, Pakistan, South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana. Kachru (1985) describes these countries as ‘norm-developing’ because they are essentially developing their own unique varieties of English, often as part of the local vernacular. Lastly, the ‘expanding circle’ countries, such as China, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan and Zimbabwe, use English as an international language and are ‘norm-dependent’ because they are not developing their own forms of English but are instead dependent on the ‘norm-providing’ forms of English. In this section I explore how class status is reflected in the localised use of Englishes that are associated within the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ circles.

Many participants joked about the way that some lower- and middle-class people speak English, with ‘funny accents’ or ‘weird words’. The implication being that these classes have not yet mastered proficiency in the ‘norm-providing’ English of Kachru’s ‘inner circle’ that is spoken by most of the relatively elite in my study. After my interview with prospective student Navita, 26, a suburban striver, she sent me a WhatsApp message<sup>22</sup> that jokes about interchangeable words or phrases that can be used to describe the same product, but with different class-specific implications. In the message, Hindi is the lowest form of linguistic expression, ‘Indian English’ (i.e. ‘outer circle’) the middle, and ‘posh’ or ‘cool’ English (i.e. ‘inner circle’) the domain of the upper class:

Lower class: Chasma

Middle class: Goggles

Upper class: Shades

Lower class: Chaddi

Middle class: Panties

Upper class: Lingerie

Lower class: Abbé chotu, do cutting chai leke aa!

Middle class: Can I have two cups of tea.

Upper class: May I have two lattés please?

<sup>22</sup> Messages like this are common in India. They are often lengthy jokes that are created with the intention of being forwarded within social networks.

In Navita's example, the choice of punctuation also infers different mannerisms and comportment associated with class: the lower class are loud(!), middle class are curt(.), and the upper class are polite(?) (see also Gilbertson, 2017a). This message is also interesting because it delineates how differently classed people access similar activities in Mumbai. In the last example, 'cutting chai' is tea that one would drink on the street for 10 rupees or US\$0.65; 'cups of tea' is something that one may ask for as both a cheaper and familiar option; whereas ordering a latté suggests a certain fluency in Western culture as well as the possession of economic capital that allows one to visit an establishment like Starbucks, where a latté costs approximately 250 rupees or US\$3.85. This is thus an intersection between linguistic as well as cosmopolitan cultural capital, taste, and consumption.

Mastery of 'norm-providing' English, which Sancho (2015: 16) calls "the language of power", remains a preserve of the urban elite who have greater access to good quality English medium education and are also more likely to inherit English linguistic cultural capital from their families (Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2008; Sancho 2015; see also Faust & Nagar, 2001; Chidsey, 2018). Jayadeva (2018), one of the few scholars who has closely observed the importance of English proficiency in relation to class formation in India, argues that English mastery is a particularly valuable form of capital because it cannot be easily acquired and is therefore assumed to be indicative of one's 'background' (see also Malhotra, 2018; Khan, 2011). Among her participants in Bangalore, Jayadeva (2018: 6) observed that "proficiency in English was viewed not just as an important type of capital required in order to claim membership of the middle class, but also as an important means of ranking within the middle class." This notion of 'ranking' within classes is also reflected in the current study, wherein different ways of speaking 'norm-providing' English accentuated granularity within the relatively elite class groups that this thesis explores.

Rather than placing importance on whether or not one speaks English versus Hindi, several participants emphasised that the *manner* in which one speaks norm-providing English denotes class status within/between the relatively elite. Suburban striver respondents were particularly aware of nuances between the English spoken by themselves versus SoBo elites. These distinctions were often noted according to word

choices of the SoBo elite, which suburban strivers asserted were different to how they would *choose* to speak. For instance, Krupa, 25, a prospective student from a suburban striver family, elaborated on the ways that she felt frustrated by one of her colleagues who belongs to a SoBo elite family:

Even just the way she talks. Of course, even I have a house help at home too, but she will say ‘staff’. ... I would never talk like that, ‘*my staff*’. That’s just, like, high society talk – rich people talk.

Suburban strivers often noted that SoBo elites spoke differently and this was perceived to be a result of their ‘background’ (Jayadeva, 2018). While Krupa rebukes what she perceives as the elitism of her colleague, she is also quick to point out that she has ‘house help at home too’. In doing so, Krupa asserts that she is not necessarily ‘behind’ her colleague in terms of economic capital because both households are aided by paid domestic service. Rather, she uses examples of language to convey her disapproval of her colleague’s pretentiousness, which is also perceived as inherent to her colleague’s SoBo elite background.

Proficiency in ‘norm-providing’ English also functioned as a marker of class distinction when students were engaged in international education. Through international education, which is primarily attained in Anglophone countries belonging to Kachru’s ‘inner circle’, participants expected to hone ways of speaking and using language that would mark them as having spent time overseas (for other Asian examples, see Huang & Yeoh, 2005; Waters, 2006a; Dong, 2018). However, some SoBo elite students suggested that suburban strivers were unable to speak ‘norm-providing’ English with the same proficiency as them, which marked their relatively lower-class status even when outside India. For instance, Umang, 22, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, explained that he quickly became aware of class difference when he met other Indian students whilst studying abroad:

U: In college in the US, I met people from the middle class of Bombay.

N: What were those interactions like?

U: I don’t know whether they knew, but I was aware of where we stood with respect to each other in India. There is a mark of difference, even with respect to the way we speak English. I was aware of it, but it was never something that I tried to keep in mind.

Umang's experiences in the USA suggest that, even when young Indian people engage in an activity like international education that has the *potential* to flatten class hierarchies, one's local class status is translated across borders. Markers that define class boundaries in India continue to operate in foreign contexts with similar results. One's 'background' is seemingly inescapable, and proficiency in 'norm-providing' English is a key component of (re)producing class boundaries within India and beyond her borders.

## **HIGH-CLASS-CASTELESSNESS**

Class is not the only form of hierarchisation in India. Caste, like class, operates as a form of identity as well as a system of ranking. Unlike class, however, one's caste is immutable (although, as Bourdieu observed, class also tends to be inherited and might be less changeable in practice than in theory). Recent studies have explored the varying roles that caste plays in the lives of urban Indians, as well as the complex relationship between caste and class (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2006, 2008; Harriss, 2012; Deshpande, 2013; Subramanian, 2015; Dickey, 2016; Frøystad, 2006). Scholars have demonstrated that caste persists in the construction of urban identities and has a demonstrable correlation to class status (Upadhyay, 2016a; Fernandes & Heller, 2006). However, participants in this study claimed that caste is no longer relevant to their identities. A thorough analysis of the important role of caste in India is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in this section I provide a brief discussion of the significance of participants' assertions that they did not know their caste identity because it 'no longer matters', resulting in the denial and misrepresentation of caste as well as the formation of 'high-class-casteless' identities.

During the interviews student participants were asked which caste and sub-caste they belong to. This question was asked at the end of the interview, when trust had been established after the student had often shared personal information about relationships, aspirations, and so on. This was a strategic deployment, given that caste is a sensitive topic in India. Parents were not asked about caste for the same reason. Many parents in the sample were conservative and the question would have been intrusive for a younger person to ask an elder (Schenk-Sandbergen, 1998; Miltiades, 2008). When students came to answer the question, many proffered that they did not know what their caste was or stated that it was not applicable to their religion, a response especially common among

Jains, Sindhis<sup>23</sup>, Christians and Zoroastrians. However, caste is by no means restricted to Hinduism and is present in all religions in India as a variety of systems of social stratification (Vaid, 2014; Deshpande, 2011; Koilparampil, 1982; Ahmad, 1978).

Other participants also gave answers that corresponded to a religion (e.g. ‘Hindu’) or community (e.g. ‘Gujarati’ or ‘Punjabi’), rather than caste (see table 2 below). For example, as Ridhima, 18, a prospective SoBo elite student explained when talking about her parents’ expectations around her marriage: “My parents would want me to marry someone from my own caste, from the Gujarati caste.” This would suggest that historical meanings of caste (or *jāti*<sup>24</sup> in Hindi) have not been carried forward into the present generation in Mumbai, resulting in varied, and often uncertain, interpretations of what caste means. However, it should be noted that – as Ridhima’s comment suggests – caste endogamy remains an important feature in contemporary urban Indian marriage practices of the middle class and elite (for further discussion see Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008; Gilbertson, 2014a; Donner, 2016; De Neve, 2016; Bêteille, 1991, 1996; see also Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006; Sabur, 2014; Still, 2011).

**Table 2: Responses to ‘What is your caste?’**

Response	Prospective Students	Returned Students
Specific caste or sub-caste	28%	20%
Unknown	35%	20%
Not applicable	12%	20%
Religion	20%	25%
Community/Region/Language	4%	15%

While some responses indicated that participants misunderstood what I intended when I asked about caste, others explained that caste is irrelevant to them. A common

<sup>23</sup> As noted in Chapter Three, Sindhi is not a religion. Sindhis belong to an ethnic community and can be Muslim, Hindu or Sikh. However, participants consistently recorded their religion as ‘Sindhi’ in the post-interview survey, which the data reported in this section is based.

<sup>24</sup> Since collecting this data, I have learned that the Hindi words *jāti* or *varna* would have been a better term to use when asking about caste, as *caste* has no good translation (see Dickey, 2016: 33-34; Jodhka & Prakash, 2016: 148-149; Deshpande, 2011: 21-3; see also Vaid, 2012, 2014; Srinivas, 2003 for summary and analysis of the complexities of *varna* and especially *jāti* in contemporary India). Using this term *may* have led to a different response from participants, however, the literature on castelessness discussed in this section suggests that the data presented here would likely be relatively unchanged had I used the term *jāti* or *varna* and not *caste*.

phrase was that they ‘don’t believe in caste’. Caste was seen as a rural issue that one leaves behind when they move to a metropolis:

I have asked [my parents] before actually, and even they don’t know. My great-grandfather moved to Mumbai, and I think after that they stopped worrying about caste. I think that most people in Mumbai are not concerned with caste – a lot of people don’t know what their caste is, because it doesn’t matter these days.

– *Ashish, male, 18, suburban striver prospective student*

If somebody asked me what caste I am, I kind of know what answer to give, but do I know what it means? No. Not really. ... I think people are just not bothered these days. I think some of it might have started because the whole casteism thing is taboo, or at least it’s more prevalent in the villages – over there, that thing is given importance. In the cities, nobody cares.

– *Jigisha, female, 28, suburban striver returned student*

Ashish and Jigisha’s comments suggest that they perceive caste as something that families shed when they move to, or live in, cities. For them, caste is an issue pervasive in rural India, symbolic of a ‘backwards’ society that exists in relative isolation. Therefore, not knowing your caste – or professing to not know – is a token of one’s modernity. A family that does not ascribe to the caste system seeks to construct themselves as inherently egalitarian and forward-thinking. Caste is thereby confined to the ‘history’ of India. However, this denial of the relevance of caste also silences an issue that is far from erased or irrelevant in contemporary urban India.

Scholars have observed that ‘castelessness’ is central to higher caste identities and that higher castes tend also to be higher class (Fernandes & Heller, 2006; Subramanian, 2015; Jodhka, 2016; Upadhy, 2016a). Deshpande (2013: 33) argues that the upper-castes construct a project of ‘castelessness’ by turning their ‘caste capital’ into ‘modern capital’, which renders caste invisible because this logic now “runs with the grain of dominant common sense.” Class statuses are secure because caste has already yielded its benefits, and so caste is “a ladder that can safely be kicked away” by the elite (Deshpande, 2013: 32). Upadhy (2016a: 273) similarly contends that caste continues to be reproduced within the middle class, precisely *through* the “vociferous denial” of caste. Subramanian also argues that the denial of caste within the upper classes results in a “postcolonial



present ... in which non-elites have caste while elites have class and other more ‘cosmopolitan’ affiliations” (2015: 296).

The data collected in this study reflects these findings, wherein individuals of high class status privilege their taste, cultural superiority and cosmopolitanism as key components of their identity, rather than their caste status. However, this attitude towards caste denies the fact that most participants are upper-middle class or elite today because caste allowed their ancestors to be successful in business or in their professional career. As the fieldwork progressed, I began to mention to participants that many previous interviewees were not able to state their caste. Anirudh, 26, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, was visibly irritated by Indian society’s silencing of the issue: “I mean, if you give me their surnames, I will *tell* you what their castes are! And they know. *Everybody* knows what their caste is. They’re just in denial.”

The issue of denial and high-class-castelessness is evident in the non-responses that participants gave to questions about their caste identities. However, on the rare occasion when elite respondents did speak about caste identities, they also revealed a similar denial of the importance of caste status. For example, Nimit, 25, a wealthy returned student from a SoBo elite family, who belongs to the high-ranked Brahmin caste, explained that he knows his caste but it is not meaningful to him:

I can tell you what kind of Brahmins my family is, because for whatever reason we have kept that knowledge alive – why, I can't figure. Nobody celebrates it. ... I would honestly think that the caste system, certainly in cities like Bombay, has been supplanted by wealth and socio-economic status, as opposed to historical ‘blood purity’.

This is an example of how the upper classes silence the issue of caste by privileging the role of class in social stratification. As Harriss (2012: n.p.) argues, caste “entails an ideology that explains and legitimates the material differences of class and power relations”, which means that caste remains significant in the acquisition of cultural capital. In Nimit’s instance, ‘historical blood purity’ has been usurped by access to forms of capital that higher castes are more readily able to access than lower castes (see Vaid, 2012; Harriss-White, 2003; Deshpande, 2011; Jodhka & Newman, 2010).

Following the literature on high-class-castelessness, this thesis takes the position that caste remains a crucial but largely unspoken factor that underpins class status in urban India (Desai & Dubey, 2012; Frøystad, 2006, 2010; Vaid, 2012, 2014; Jodhka, 2016). However, the overall silence on caste from participants limits the capacity of this thesis to integrate caste into the analysis in the following chapters. While I acknowledge that this is a limitation in the discussion, I follow the assertions of several scholars who state that, while caste is relevant, the study of class is arguably a better approach to understanding contemporary urban Indian societies. For instance, Sara Dickey (2000: 464) argues that, “class, which is more mutable than caste and derives more directly from both economic and social standing, has become one of the most potent idioms of identity, rank, and political power in contemporary India, particularly in urban areas.” This thesis seeks to study class without a significant focus on caste, not because caste is unimportant, but because class is a rich subject that is deeply embedded in how young people in Mumbai experience international education.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has explored how class statuses and differences are imagined by participants in Mumbai, which underpins the ‘localised micro-categories of class’ concept that I put forward in this thesis. This chapter makes a contribution towards understanding how the upper-middle class and elite conceptualise class in urban India and how they perceive and negotiate class boundaries, which makes an important addition to the literature on class in India that has tended to ignore the relatively elite. In identifying class boundaries, respondents often described class as a relational project and tended to position themselves as part of the upper-middle class. Respondents justified their ‘middleness’ by distancing themselves from the very elite (the Ambani family was often a reference point), who they saw as synonymous with excess and immorality. This reflects existing literature that finds a widespread desirability to belong to the middle – even when one’s capital objectively places them outside the middle.

Two localised micro-categories of class emerged from the analysis of class boundaries – SoBo elites and suburban strivers – both of which belong to the relatively elite segment of Indian society. Although this categorisation is not absolute and some participants did not fit neatly into either category, there were clear trends in the ways that

each group was made distinct by the capital that members possess, or are imagined to possess. The SoBo elite reside in South Mumbai, which is where most of Mumbai's 'old money' families live and is therefore assumed to be the domain of the wealthy. The SoBo elite also tend to have successful family businesses, speak 'norm-providing' English in a certain manner that denotes their status, and spend money or consume products that mark their elite status. This group is imagined to possess high economic capital as well as high cultural capital and therefore belong to the elite segment of Mumbai society.

On the other hand, suburban strivers reside in the suburbs and represented Mumbai's 'new money'. Living in the suburbs was considered to be less sophisticated and less desirable than residing in South Mumbai. Members of the suburban striver group typically belonged to families who occupied professional positions with salaried incomes. This group often sought to distance themselves from the SoBo elite, though not *too* much. They marked these differences by noting that they *choose* to speak English differently, and *choose* to spend their money differently. The implication being that the suburban strivers imagined their position as distinct from the SoBo elite, but not inferior. This is similar to findings in the literature in which middle-class people distinguish themselves from the elite by asserting their superior morality, 'simplicity' and measured consumption (Nisbett, 2007; van Wessel, 2004; McGuire, 2011).

This chapter found that, while economic capital provides access to other forms of capital and can theoretically facilitate upward social mobility, participants skilfully construct socio-economic and cultural boundaries that mark lines of distinction between various relatively elite identities. For young people in Mumbai, economic capital forms the basis of access to resources, but how an individual – and their peer group – is able to mobilise these resources is crucial to how others evaluate their class status. In discussing these markers of class distinction, this chapter has established the foundations of participants' understandings of class that will be carried through the rest of this thesis. In the chapter that follows, the localised micro-categories of class laid out in this chapter will inform my discussion about the international education industry in Mumbai. In later empirical chapters, these localised micro-categories of class will also be pivotal when considering how the SoBo elite and suburban strivers differently and unevenly experience both the pre-departure and post-study phases of life in relation to international education.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### **‘IT’S A FULLY CALCULATED THING’: ENCOUNTERING THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION INDUSTRY**

“Going abroad, it’s a fully calculated thing. Families look at the big picture and they take a decision based on all the information.”

– Dhruv, male, education counsellor

International education is a commodity that is the focus of a massive global industry. The international education industry has an obvious presence in Indian metropolises: billboards advertise coaching classes for admission exams, national newspapers feature lift out sections devoted to predominantly international education, radio advertisements spruik upcoming ‘education roadshows’ and advertising on social media is awash with advice about where to study. Despite the almost unavoidable visibility of the industry that caters to the educational aspirations of India’s (upper-)middle classes and elite, scholars infrequently direct their attention towards this industry. This chapter highlights the role of education agents and counsellors within Mumbai’s international education industry, arguing that the services that agents and counsellors provide, who has access to them and the outcomes of accessing these services are typically governed by the class status of prospective students. Specifically, SoBo elites and suburban strivers have divergent experiences of the international education industry.

The above comment from Dhruv highlights the centrality that information about international education plays in the decision-making processes of prospective students and their families. This chapter will demonstrate that class status is a crucial factor in the making of vulnerability within Mumbai’s international education industry. SoBo elites possess greater stores of capital that enable them to access reliable information about international education, while suburban strivers are prone to rely on the advice of agents/counsellors and are more likely to take out student loans. These differing levels of accumulated capital impact how individuals and families make decisions about

international education and how they engage with Mumbai's international education industry.

Extending the body of literature on international education industries discussed in Chapter Two, I first explain differences between education agents and counsellors, illuminating class distinctions that are performed within these professional spaces. Second, I explore how SoBo elites and suburban strivers possess disparate levels of capital, which impacts their access to and experience of the international education industry. Third, I explain how recent changes to the United Kingdom's Post-Study Work Visa policy has impacted perceptions about the class status of who studies in the UK, affecting advice provided to prospective students by agents and counsellors. Last, I turn to suburban striver participants who took education loans and examine the potentially misplaced confidence among this group that they will repay their loans without issue. In this chapter I argue that localised micro-categories of class impact the international education industry in ways that potentially produce uneven mobilities.

## **DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN AGENTS AND COUNSELLORS**

The fact that there are differences between agents and counsellors is a point often neglected in scholarly literature, and one that education counsellors were particularly quick to make during interviews. Scholars tend to refer to this group homogenously as 'agents', 'intermediaries' and 'brokers' (for example, see Adhikari, 2010; Beech, 2018; Thieme, 2017; Collins, 2012; Sidhu, 2002). However, data collected in the present study demonstrate that there are clear differences between, at the very least, how agents and counsellors in Mumbai *imagine* their businesses and their role in the international education industry. These distinctions also correlate to localised micro-categories of class in Mumbai, wherein counsellors tend to cater to SoBo elites while agents' clientele are typically suburban strivers.

In this empirical context, an education agent is an individual or company selling international education and earning a commission from the receiving institution, usually offering their services free-of-charge to the student. Agents are often framed – especially in the media – as unscrupulous operators who deceive naïve students, often by providing biased or even fraudulent information in order to maximise their commission (Tan, 2015;

Acharya, 2017). Agent deception and corruption has also been observed in academic literature (for example, see Lindquist, 2012; Baas, 2007).

By contrast, an education counsellor is an individual or company selling international education in a fee-for-service model, wherein prospective students pay the counsellor directly. Counselling fees vary drastically; participants reported paying US\$160 (Rs. 10,000) for basic services from a suburban-based counsellor, up to US\$4660 (Rs. 3 lakhs) for a suite of services from well-known South Mumbai counsellors. Counsellors in the sample stated that they do not receive commission from receiving institutions, however, universities do not publicly release information about who they pay commission to so it is impossible to know definitively whether or not counsellors do indeed receive payment from universities. Evidence provided by participants, as well as my own experiences working in a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) in Melbourne<sup>25</sup>, suggest that universities and other tertiary institutions can pay commission of up to 10% of the first year of fees. For an average international student going to one of Australia's elite 'Group of Eight' universities<sup>26</sup>, an agent (or counsellor) could earn approximately US\$1500<sup>27</sup> in commission.

The services that education agents and counsellors offer vary widely. At a minimum, all brokers provide advice on where to study, which courses are 'best', tuition costs, estimated living expenses, how to apply to the university and for a student visa (see also Caluya et al., 2011). Counsellors tend to be more involved throughout the application process, offering extensive services that include assistance with essay writing, CV and interview preparation, entrance test coaching, career counselling, 24-hour assistance,

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<sup>25</sup> RTOs deliver vocational courses in Australia, many of which attract large numbers of international students seeking to obtain qualifications that correspond to the Skilled Occupation List. RTOs have also been a source of controversy in Australia over the past decade, as many have been found to be 'dodgy', leaving tens of thousands of international students stranded when the government shut them down (ABC News, 2009a, 2009b; Cook, 2016). Baas's (2007) research also reflects my professional experiences, in which the vast majority of RTOs are thought of as 'Permanent Residency factories' that facilitate skilled migration.

<sup>26</sup> Incorporated in 1999, the Group of Eight (Go8) is a collective of Australia's leading research universities, including The University of Melbourne, The Australian National University, The University of Sydney, The University of Queensland, The University of Western Australia, The University of Adelaide, Monash University and UNSW Sydney.

<sup>27</sup> A search of Go8 university websites reveals that the average yearly fees for an international student are approximately US\$15,000 (AU\$20,000).

Skype meetings, and so forth. Several participants claimed that certain counsellors write essays on behalf of students, if they are willing to pay a premium. Counsellors use a fairly uniform formula to help students select a set of universities to apply to. Beginning with a larger list of possible institutions, counsellors work with their clients to identify ‘dream colleges’, ‘aspirational colleges’ and ‘fall-back colleges’. The client then applies to several institutions from each category. Counsellors explained that this approach allowed their clients to better digest their educational options. The ‘fall-back college’ applications also enhanced clients’ chances of successful admission to a foreign university, which allows counsellors to promote their business as achieving a ‘100% admission rate’.

Of the six education counsellors that participated in the study, all were returned international students and many had graduated from prestigious institutions in the USA and UK. Counsellors used their qualifications as a badge of their superior knowledge of international education industries, which several prospective students reported as a primary reason why they chose to employ the services of a counsellor rather than an agent. In this sense, counsellors reflect other types of intermediaries within migration industries who draw on their own prior experiences of migration to build brokerage businesses – Sanchez (2014) for example shows how smugglers have often previously traversed smuggling routes as migrants themselves, and Cranston (2017) reveals how urban arrival services for elite migrants are often run by former migrants to the area. This contrasts starkly to the six agents in the study, four of whom had never been overseas, none were returned international students, and only one had travelled to an Anglophone country that receives a significant number of international students from India. Agents were therefore unable to offer the same experiential knowledge that counsellors provide to their clients.

There was also a perceptible difference in the office spaces of agents and counsellors. Counsellors were located in South Mumbai or the more affluent suburbs, they had larger offices with lots of natural light, new furniture, consulting rooms, glass-walled cubicles, classrooms for entrance test coaching, glossy brochures, and so on. Some had a ‘youthful’ tone with beanbags scattered throughout their office and employees working on Mac laptops. Conversely, the agents I visited tended to be one or two person teams<sup>28</sup> and were all located in the suburbs. Their offices were small and cramped with

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<sup>28</sup> There are also very big agencies, but I was unsuccessful in recruiting them to the study.



tired furniture, often located in crumbling buildings with *paan*-stained staircases<sup>29</sup>. Their advertising material was often sparse and the print-quality was noticeably poorer than counsellors' glossy brochures.

The different spaces and services that agents/counsellors occupy are illustrative of the class status of both the education agent/counsellor, as well as their clientele. Counsellors assert their superiority in the market by, for instance, maintaining plush offices in elite socio-economic areas of the city and offering 'comprehensive' services. Counsellors also insist on being categorised differently to agents, consciously asserting a line of distinction within the market. That counsellors charge a fee-for-service also implies that their services should be more highly valued than the free services of agents. Further, agents appear to lack the inherited capital that would facilitate study or travel overseas, unlike counsellors who had all travelled and completed degrees abroad. SoBo elites are therefore able to assert their privilege by affording the services of a counsellor, though an agent could equally provide the services (such as visa applications) free-of-cost to the student. These factors produce a classed international education industry, wherein differing levels of capital create uneven access to and experiences pertaining to the international education industry.

## MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Migration brokers are often central to the decisions that prospective migrants make about their mobility. Migration brokers, especially in labour migration contexts, are frequently characterised as people with questionable morals who take advantage of potential migrants' lack of knowledge and willingness to pay to leave their home country (Lindquist, 2012; Khan, forthcoming). What is potentially problematic across all forms of migration brokerage is that the power of brokers is relatively unchecked (Kern & Müller-Böker, 2015). In the international education industry, agents (and counsellors, though this distinction is not often made in the literature) are broadly understood to hold considerable power in determining where students enrol (Beech, 2018; Adhikari, 2010). However, relatively little is known about how prospective students make decisions about

<sup>29</sup> *Paan* is a popular stimulant and/or digestive consumed in South Asia, which is usually spat out after being chewed, leaving bright red stains in many public and semi-public spaces.

international education (Raghuram, 2013) which means that the ways in which they might be vulnerable during mobility processes are also relatively unknown.

Knowledge about educational qualifications is crucial if one is to convert foreign degrees into other forms of capital. As Bourdieu (1984: 142) argues, “one of the most valuable sorts of information constituting inherited cultural capital is practical or theoretical knowledge of ... academic qualifications, the sense of investment which enables one to get the best return on inherited cultural capital in the scholastic market or on scholastic capital in the labour market.” Bourdieu goes on to argue that ‘newcomers’ to certain educational qualifications are more likely to ‘expect’ the acquisition of said qualifications to afford privilege that they observed “at a time when they themselves were excluded from it” (1984: 143). The knowledge that an individual accumulates about education and the choices, expectations and aspirations that they subsequently develop are thereby inflected by class status.

There were stark differences between the SoBo elites and suburban strivers when it came to having confidence to make decisions about international education and possessing adequate and sound information to make ‘good’ choices. As Chapter Six will demonstrate, SoBo elites accumulate knowledge about ‘abroad’ from childhood: they travel overseas for leisure from a young age, they have large networks of transnationally mobile friends, family and peers, and they attend international schools that promote ‘global citizenship’ (Gilbertson, 2017a; Sancho, 2015; Rizvi, 2017). For example, Nidhi, 20, a SoBo elite who was in the process of lodging college applications on her own, explained why she did not enlist the help of an agent or counsellor:

I just felt like I didn’t need help, you know. My dad has so many friends whose kids are already abroad, so I met them and asked for their opinions. ... In school we had a lot of seminars about how to apply abroad, so I just felt like I already knew how to do it by myself.

The social capital that SoBo elites possess ensures that these students are fluent in the process of applying to foreign universities and have developed résumés that will allow them to apply successfully. The experiential knowledge that counsellors provide to SoBo elites therefore builds on prior knowledge that this group accumulates across their lifecourse.

Suburban strivers, on the other hand, do not typically grow-up with the presupposition that they will study overseas; this is a decision that participants reported occurring much later according to the family's financial status, academic ability of the student, political climates, job and migration prospects. This decision also relates strongly to the individual's and the family's aspirations (see also Waters, 2005, 2006a; Azmat et al., 2013; Sancho, 2015; Rizvi, 2014; Gilbertson, 2016, 2017a). However, suburban strivers' 'world' does not necessarily include training to become a 'global citizen', so they often lack knowledge and networks that SoBo elites have which facilitate relatively straightforward navigation through the international education industry. Consequently, suburban strivers are more vulnerable to the potential trappings of agents or counsellors, who may be driven by profit rather than the best possible outcome for the student (Adhikari, 2010). The agents and counsellors who participated in this study appeared to cater to the desires and capabilities of their clients, and so the data that follow illustrates the *potential* vulnerability of students who possess less capital than their more elite peers.

Lacking knowledge about international education and/or the confidence to make decisions about where and what to study was a common reason cited by suburban strivers for seeking the services of an agent or counsellor. Of the 15 suburban strivers in the prospective student sample, 12 had spoken to an agent (10) or a counsellor (2) – compared to the 11 SoBo elite in the sample, of whom only 5 had engaged an education counsellor and 6 had completed the process without assistance from an agent or counsellor. Many of the suburban striver participants reported closely following the guidance of their agent/counsellor because they trusted the advice they received. For instance, Bapu, 27, who was working full-time at a fast-food restaurant to save money towards his living expenses in the US, explained why he followed the advice of his agent:

He told me that this college is the best one for me. I can't afford the expensive schools, so I needed one that had a good fee structure. But I also wanted to make sure that I study somewhere proper. ... I needed a recommendation for a school that's good but also affordable. ... The agent is a good friend of my friend, so I trust him and I trust his opinion. He has no reason to cheat me, so I went with what he suggested. I have no clue about MBAs or any education overseas, so I have to trust what he says.

In a follow-up with Bapu once he had begun his MBA in a small American college, he reported that he was happy with the tuition he was receiving but disappointed by the lack

of student diversity – all his classmates were international students from South Asia. However, it is not difficult to imagine how this scenario could have had negative outcomes had the agent not acted with integrity, as is periodically reported in the media wherein unsuspecting students are given false information, robbed of their money or enrolled into bogus colleges (Tan, 2015; Acharya, 2017; Saini, 2008; see also Baas, 2007). Reliance on agents and counsellors potentially makes suburban striver students vulnerable, especially where agents are motivated by commission.

Reliance on agents or counsellors was not always as obvious as in Bapu's case, however. For many other students, especially those who spoke to counsellors, the influence that industry professionals had on their decisions was subtler. Participants, particularly suburban strivers, often reported feeling overwhelmed by the volume of tertiary institutions that they could apply to. In 23-year-old suburban striver Rohit's example, the counsellor's process of selecting colleges provided parameters that helped him decide where to apply for his master's degree in the USA:

I had no idea how to select my colleges. He gave me the list of 15-20 colleges depending on my score. He told me to review those colleges and to decide how I feel about these colleges, then shortlist seven or eight, and then come back. So then I searched on the internet regarding the quality of education, the subjects offered, how are the students, what are the students' reviews, do we get internships or jobs if I join that college, what are the tuition fees, the rankings of the college. And then I applied to several colleges from that list.

Rohit's experience was typical of how prospective students and counsellors interact: student approaches counsellor with their grades and educational desires, counsellor shortlists 10-20 colleges to which they believe the student could gain admission, student and their family then shortlist 5-10 that they then apply to. However, while Rohit reports playing the central role in determining which colleges he applied to and independently sought information about each college, his counsellor provided the original list of 15-20 colleges that governed Rohit's subsequent decisions. The US alone has several thousand colleges that students can apply to, so the counsellor's role in narrowing this to 15-20 institutions significantly influences a student's decision. A consequence of this is that students who lack networks that can provide supplementary information about international education are more reliant on the advice and/or processes of education agents or counsellors, and are therefore also reliant on the integrity of these professionals.

SoBo elites possess more resources than suburban strivers by virtue of their accumulated social capital, making them less vulnerable when they interact with the international education industry.

While agents and counsellors who participated in the study appeared to operate with genuine concern for their clients, participants also reported dissatisfaction with advice they had received from other agents (interestingly, no participant reported being unhappy with a counsellor), and ultimately did their own research and application process. Swapnali, 21, a prospective suburban striver student who had recently completed her undergraduate degree at a local university, explained that the agent she visited was ‘intent’ on channelling her into certain decisions:

My parents ... don’t know anything about universities abroad. All they know is that I should get really good education. ... I saw an agent, but that was just very fruitless because the universities they suggested were really bad. ... They were just intent on selling me their colleges and wouldn’t listen [to] any of my requests.

Swapnali’s experience highlights the potential for agents to influence students who are less confident or able to independently research international education options. Swapnali explained that she had spent many hours exploring websites of foreign universities, attended education fairs, contacted students at various universities through Facebook groups, and was also well-versed in global university rankings and visa policies. This research, while time-intensive, allowed her to discern the quality of advice she received from agents.

However, most participants in the study were not as thorough as Swapnali in their research. Instead, they tended to rely on guidance from people within their community (including agents and counsellors), citing that they did not trust information available on the internet. This places SoBo elites in a better position to obtain reliable information and advice about international education options because they have larger networks of mobile peers and contacts, whereas suburban strivers are more likely to rely on the information they receive from education agents and counsellors. The capital that prospective international students accumulate over the course of their lives, by virtue of their existing class status and inherited social, economic and (cosmopolitan) cultural capital, colours their interactions with the international education industry.

It was widely reported by SoBo elite students that, if desired, students can purchase ‘additional’ services from certain counsellors, who would then write their college applications for them. Not only do SoBo elite students have access to more reliable information about international education on the basis of their networks, their access to economic capital can also facilitate the purchase of additional advantages. Tushar, 22, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, who had attended an elite international (IB) school, explained that many of his classmates had employed the same well-known education counsellor, not because they necessarily needed help but because it was available to them:

A lot people use him really heavily. He writes their essays for them, tells them which course to apply for, when to apply, what to put on their CV to make it amazing for that university. ... It’s not that they even need help, but it’s just Indian culture, like, ‘Oh, if I can pay someone to get into the university that I want, why not?’ It’s just an Indian thing.

Ethically, counsellors should not be writing college applications on behalf of students. When asked, counsellors stated that they ‘simply guided’ the students and would never actually write an application. However, several student respondents refuted this when they unknowingly named some counsellors who participated in the study as those who are known to write college essays for a fee. Tushar suggests that this is an ‘Indian thing’, however, I contend that purchasing advantage is a ‘class thing’ available to the SoBo elite who can afford upwards of US\$4660 (Rs. 3 lakhs) in counselling fees. This reflects the ‘excesses’ and ‘immorality’ of the elite described by participants in Chapter Four, and also speaks to the notion that international education is matter of prestige and grooming for SoBo elite families. That SoBo elite students have the ability to purchase advantages from the international education industry reinforces class boundaries wherein suburban strivers are perpetually unable to ‘keep up’ (see also Gilbertson, 2017a).

Several suburban striver students, who were unable to afford the services of a counsellor, were acutely aware of the advantages that SoBo elite students are able to purchase. Urvashi, 24, a prospective student from a suburban striver family, explained that her student visa application had previously been rejected by the Canadian government because she was unable to demonstrate access to adequate funds. This was an issue that probably would have been overcome had she sought the advice of an agent or counsellor, as she insisted it was not a matter of having inadequate funds but rather

that she did not disclose the information properly. Despite this, Urvashi was extremely critical of 'rich' students who sought assistance from industry professionals to aid their decisions about international education:

People consult agents or consultants because they have no clue about what they are trying to do. Their sights are more on going abroad, on living the American lifestyle rather than actually focusing on what degree they're doing ... I mean, if you don't know what to write about why you want to go to the university you want to get in to, then you're an idiot! You shouldn't be going anyways! ... People who hire consultants are anyways already rich. They don't care where the money is going so they can hire fifty people to create an absolutely impeccable application and not have the brains to stand up to it. The application and their personality could be, like, miles apart.

SoBo elites are able to purchase advantage by employing the services of education counsellors, which reiterates that localised micro-categories of class shape the experiences that prospective students have when they interact with Mumbai's international education industry. Urvashi's comment also highlights the fact that some students, particularly from suburban striver backgrounds, are not uncritical or unaware of the potentially problematic role that the international education industry plays at the pre-departure phase of student mobility. Her experience also implies that suburban strivers need to be more vigilant when they engage with the international education industry, as they lack the accumulated capital that would allow them to fluently negotiate visa and university applications. A similar unevenness was observed in relation to student loans, discussed below.

## **'RISK FREE' EDUCATION LOANS**

Education loans are a central component of the services provided by agents and counsellors, as well as the international education industry at large. In India, education loans worth US\$3.5 billion (25,000 crore rupees) were disbursed in 2013-2016 (Dubbudu, 2016). Agents and counsellors are often the first point of contact for prospective students to discuss financial aspects of international education, including obtaining an educational bank loan. In this study, only one SoBo elite student reported that they were planning to obtain an education loan, and this student was quick to explain that this was because their parents wanted to instil fiscal responsibility rather than because they could not otherwise afford to purchase a foreign degree. This section thus focuses on prospective students from suburban striver families who tend to imagine that they will easily obtain

employment in the host country that will allow them to repay their loan with ease. However, existing literature on international students and debt suggests that repaying loans might not be as ‘risk free’ as prospective suburban striver students imagine.<sup>30</sup>

In recent years, the often-substantial bank loans that many non-Western students take in order to fund their international education has increasingly drawn the attention of scholars (Thomas, 2017; Baas, 2007, 2014; Findlay et al., 2017; for domestic Indian context see also Varman, Sana & Skålen, 2011; Varghese & Manoj, 2013). Thomas’s (2017) recent article on debt, precarity, and Indian international students is of particular relevance here. Discussing the role that debt plays in the experiences of Indian ‘middle class’ students at a college in New York City, Thomas finds that their ability to access education loans “not only meant the promise of higher education but also the status that a degree at a U.S. university represents” (2017: 1880). However, Thomas and others (Baas, 2007, 2014; Robertson, 2015; Findlay et al., 2017) have argued that education loans often leave students in a precarious position in which they must obtain work overseas to repay their loans. Baas (2014) notes that his participants experienced ‘considerable stress’ and were in a ‘vulnerable position’ because they *had* to obtain work in Australia in order to repay their loans. Thomas (2017) adds that, for most Indian students, education loans are attached to family assets, so they experienced additional pressure to ensure that they repay the loans on time so as not to jeopardise the entire family’s financial security (see also Tran, 2016). What is overlooked in this body of literature is that there exist different ‘types’ of Indian international students who have very different financial experiences of international education. Scholars often refer to ‘the middle class’ without interrogating what this means or who it includes and excludes. This section highlights the importance taking a nuanced approach to theorising class status when talking about education loans, arguing that this is yet another instance in which localised micro-categories of class shape the experiences of prospective international students.

In the prospective student sample, almost 40% (10) had taken an education loan from an Indian bank and all of these students were from suburban striver families. As

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<sup>30</sup> For general literature on risk and transnational mobility see, for example Williams & Baláž, 2012, 2013; Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012.



mentioned above, SoBo elite participants had rarely taken education loans, presumably because their families possess sufficient economic capital to cover the cost of tuition and additional living expenses. As Chapter Seven will discuss, education loans often dictate the return trajectories of international students and/or the circumstances under which they return. SoBo elites did not have loans, so they were also assumed to take their education less ‘seriously’ (see Chapters Six, Seven and Eight). For participants, the ability to study without a loan versus the need for a loan and then a job to repay that loan were important components of a broader imaginary of different class categories’ approaches to international education. Priyanka, an education agent and mother with two sons studying in Canada, explained the differences between the ‘rich class’ and ‘middle class’ on the basis of either having or not having an education loan:

Rich-class will never have a loan, right. Middle-class students care about their studies because they have a loan, so they need to do things to make sure they can pay back that loan. See, at the back of their minds they know that we have to ‘make it’. Our parents will not be able to do it, though they will maintain how much, whatever they can, but the parents will need the help of their children.

Priyanka’s comment highlights the suburban strivers’ dependence on working overseas after graduating. She suggests that, for those who fail to ‘make it’, repaying loans will be very difficult or impossible for the family in India. Despite the employment imperative described by Priyanka, suburban striver participants consistently insisted that they did not perceive any risk in taking out a loan because they were certain they would obtain paid work upon graduation.

Loans taken by suburban striver families were intended to partially finance international education. Remaining expenses were covered either by parents’ savings or divestment of assets such as shares or property. In most cases, a student’s family had saved enough for the first semester’s fees and living expenses and a low-interest education loan was taken to finance the rest of the education. Participants were often reluctant to reveal the size of their loans, so reliable data on this is not available within the present sample, though one can reasonably assume that most of these loans were upwards of US\$14,000 (Rs. 10 lakhs), with the highest possible loan that a student can take capped

by the Indian government at US\$28,000 (Rs. 20 lakhs).<sup>31</sup> For students from suburban striver families, working overseas was a way to gain valuable workplace experience (discussed further in Chapter Six), but was also – importantly – a way to recover the money that their family had invested in their education. Contrary to my pre-fieldwork assumptions about how students would feel about taking out substantial loans to pay for their education, the vast majority of prospective students who were taking a loan assured me that they perceived almost no risks in being able to pay off their loans because they anticipated getting a well-paid job overseas with relative ease.

Suburban strivers assumed that some destinations would be easier than others to obtain work as a graduate. At the time of interviewing, the USA was particularly popular among students in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields because they were given longer visas than students in other disciplines, allowing them more time to work towards repaying their loans (though these visa entitlements have since been walked back, see Merrick, 2018; Kably, 2018). This was a popular selling point among agents and counsellors, who added that more time spent working would create better likelihood for sponsorship toward permanent employment and further career mobility. Fazlur, an education agent catering to suburban striver students, explained the value of visas with relatively long work rights attached:

See, when you have a loan then you have to think very carefully about things. You can't just do this and that. ... A lot of the guys we see like the US because you get a longer visa if you're into STEM subjects. So they think, 'Ok good, this will give me extra time to figure out and pay back my loan'. ... Then they start looking at, well, maybe whether this extra working time will get me a permanent job over there.

That the USA is a particularly attractive destination for STEM students because of the longer visa time was echoed by prospective students, who also imagined the prestige of possessing an American degree would propel their careers. Jignesh, 22, a prospective student from a suburban striver family, explained that he had chosen to study a Master of Electrical Engineering in the US because he is eligible for a longer visa, which would

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<sup>31</sup> Some private banks offer loans of up to US\$70,000 or Rs. 50 lakhs, but the vast majority of students take education loans from government-run banks. See Nathan, 2018; Careers 360, 2018 (these numbers are consistent with those provided on individual bank websites as of August 2018).

allow him enough time to gain adequate exposure that he felt was crucial to further career mobility:

I would work there for two years or so, and then it's *easy* to get that [loan] money back, so I don't need to worry because I have the visa. And with the education that I'll get, the return on investment is very high. When I look ten years down the line, if I have a degree from this college in the US, I can go anywhere in the world and I can get employed. It's *that* effective. So, like, a small amount of investment can actually give you a lot of returns back when you consider the larger picture. ... Everybody knows the value of a US degree. So once you have an education from the United States, you can go anywhere in the world.

Jignesh appeared certain that his endeavours will produce successful results and did not seem concerned about potential pitfalls, such as changing immigration policies or shifts in the job market (both of which have arguably occurred since I spoke to Jignesh in mid-2016). His comments were similar to those of many STEM students going to the USA who believed their foreign degrees would carry significant value, leading to 'easy' return on investment and recovery of loan monies. Jignesh, like many prospective suburban striver students, was confident that there is an almost-guaranteed pathway between obtaining a foreign degree and gaining well-paid employment overseas.

This reflects the argument made by Bourdieu (1984), mentioned earlier, that "newcomers" to educational qualifications are more likely to "expect" degrees to yield privilege that they had observed when they were excluded from accessing these qualifications. Suburban strivers' lack of anxiety possibly arises from assurances that agents (and counsellors) give their clients about their ability to find work after they graduate. However, research conducted with international students in host countries suggests that participants' optimism is potentially misplaced. Thomas (2017: 1876) finds that the desire for "global elite status" places international students in perilous positions in which they must confront the consequences of "exorbitant student loans ... job insecurity, and precarious working conditions" (see also Baas, 2014; Findlay et al., 2017; Tran, 2016).

I presented my scepticism to professionals working within the banking industry, who assured me that risks associated with taking an education loan were controlled by bank and government policies. An employee from a large privately owned bank, who

held a senior position within the educational loans department in New Delhi, explained that education loans are low interest, do not have to be repaid immediately, and have a low default rate. He explained that this is because the risks are carefully calculated by parents and the bank based on the earning potential of the student:

Because they're mostly getting a technical degree ... it's a calculated thing. The parents know that he's going to start a job that will pay him at least US\$80,000 a year. So if they send him to these-these-these schools, which are at this cost, then they know they are covered in this amount of time. It's fully structured. The parents save up a certain amount. It's calculated. So that's why, when they're taking out the loan, there's no issue. Because they all go there and get jobs.

He also added that the banks are highly selective in deciding which loans to approve, which further reduces risk:

I would estimate that we approve 35-40% of loan applications, which also indicates that there is a large number of people who are aspiring to obtain an education that is beyond their means. But those who are getting loans, it means they can afford.

While bank employees were keen to demonstrate the rigour of their loaning processes, recently released reports from the Reserve Bank of India show that there has been a 142% increase in education loan defaults since 2014 (Mathew, 2017). However, families also take out loans for domestic tertiary education, so this number represents a rise in loan defaults that are not specific to the international education sector (see Mathews, 2017). Nonetheless, a significant rise in loan defaults likely indicates that Indian students are not obtaining the level of income that they anticipate will arise from their tertiary qualifications (a trend that has been similarly noted by Jeffrey, 2010; Jeffrey, Jeffery & Jeffery, 2008). This may imply that, in line with those who apply for loans who the bank deems 'beyond their means', aspirations that are attached to (international) education may not be entirely realistic. Furthermore, this response suggests that banks take the earning potential of the prospective student into consideration when granting a loan, which is inherently risky given the volatile nature of both immigration policies and job markets in host countries. This unevenness speaks to the different class positions of suburban strivers as compared to SoBo elites. For suburban strivers, international education represents an aspirational pathway in which better livelihoods and lifestyles can possibly be realised by taking calculated risks. For SoBo elites, by contrast, international education is

presupposed as they transition to adulthood and their existing economic capital is sufficient to ensure that risk calculations are not a component of their international education, which means that they have a very different experience of studying overseas compared to suburban strivers.

## CLASSED EDUCATION DESTINATIONS

Agents and counsellors sometimes attempt to mitigate unstable job and migration environments by providing advice to students on the basis of their aspirations. However, agents and counsellors also make assumptions about a prospective student's class status (based on markers pertaining to localised micro-categories of class) and accordingly tailor the advice they administer. As such, class status not only influences the ways in which prospective students access information, but also the information about international education that they receive. This results in certain destinations being associated with specific localised micro-categories of class.

This trend was implicit in the fact that no SoBo elite participants were considering or had studied in Singapore, Australia, New Zealand or Canada, whereas these destinations were popular among suburban strivers. Suburban strivers often cited cheaper fees as a key factor in their decision, as well as favourable post-study employment and visa options. Gurbinder, 22, a suburban striver weighing up his master's degree options, explained that potential destinations are limited by what his family can afford:

My family isn't so rich that I can just go wherever I want. ... I'm looking mostly at Australia and New Zealand because they have seem to have good course fee structures. And I can work there for two years after graduation. ... My agent also told me that Canada is good, so I'm looking into that now too.

For SoBo elites, destinations were limited by prestige rather than by what families can afford. Harsh, 19, a SoBo elite who had recently finished high school described how the USA is the first preference of all his peers and the UK is a back-up, whereas the countries that Gurbinder is considering are unlikely to make 'the list':

One of the reasons that a lot of people go to the US, it's like a developed first world country. The US seems like the biggest thing in the world. ... If someone is being offered to go anywhere around the world, they would say US first, especially career-wise. ... If you take my batch at [names elite

international school], almost everyone has applied to US. And the backup country is the UK. Australia and those countries are, like, way down the list.

These responses suggest that certain study destinations correlate to localised micro-categories of class in Mumbai. However, this gap between the aspirations of suburban strivers and SoBo elites is not only dictated by access to economic capital. Agents and counsellors also play a significant role in determining the destinations students come to imagine as possible at any given time. For example, at the time of data collection, recent changes to the UK's Post-Study Work visa policy had negatively impacted the desirability of the UK degree, which resulted in agents/counsellors recommending UK universities only to elite students who are willing to return to India immediately after graduating. In the following section, I unpack this example to show the influence of agents in mediating shifting policy landscapes and continually reconstructing hierarchies of destination countries in relation to the SoBo versus striver class boundary.

Like many Anglophone countries, from the late 1990s the UK experienced several decades of significant tertiary education sector expansion, including substantial growth in the number of international student enrolments (British Council, 2015). In 2010, however, the Coalition government announced that they would fulfil a campaign promise to curtail net immigration to the UK by introducing an “annual limit to the number of non-European Union economic migrants admitted to the UK” (Cabinet Office, 2010: 21; see also Levatino et al., 2018). Subsequently, the UK government announced a cap of 20,700 places for non-European Economic Area (EEA) skilled workers (Mavroudi & Warren, 2013). For international students, the final blow came in April 2012, when the Post-Study Work visa was closed. This visa programme had previously allowed non-EEA graduates from UK universities to work in the UK for up to two years after graduation (Lomer, 2018). Participants explained that this was an attractive pathway for students to earn money to repay their loans. Under the post-2012 conditions, graduates wishing to work in the UK have to convince an employer to sponsor a visa or develop a business in the UK under the Graduate Entrepreneur scheme (Mavroudi & Warren, 2013). Consequently, obtaining a work permit in the UK after graduating has become very difficult for Indian students.

The difficulty of staying in the UK after study has impacted perceptions in Mumbai about who studies in the UK and why. For participants in the study, prospective students seeking education in the UK fell into two categories. First, SoBo elites were assumed not to need to find a job upon graduating because they had family businesses to return to in India, so their decision to study in the UK was an indication of their elite status. Second, suburban strivers usually intend to establish professional careers overseas after graduating, so post-study work opportunities are a key factor in where they decide to study. Suburban strivers who decided to study in the UK post-2012 were therefore assumed to have been “conned” by unscrupulous agents.

Sitting in his brightly lit office in one of Mumbai’s most prestigious street addresses, Ankit, an education counsellor catering to South Mumbai’s elite, explained that he can ascertain a student’s class status according to their study destination and subsequent migration trajectories:

If someone is going to the UK it means they are coming back, so I would say they are most likely to be upper-upper or upper class, or sometimes upper-middle class. They wouldn’t be middle, because the middle class is spending when they know that the kid is going to stay back and send money to the family. So the middle wouldn’t go to the UK as much. There are a few people who do, but they get conned into it.

The intention to return or not to return after graduating dictates choices about study destinations. This is not new; the education-migration nexus has been well explored (Robertson, 2013; Baas, 2010). However, the notion that class is explicitly attached to one’s (expected) migration trajectories demonstrates further that destinations correlate to localised micro-categories of class. That is, going to the UK has arguably become a marker of elite status by excluding particular mobility aspirations of those who are ‘lower’ in the class hierarchy and must work overseas in order to justify their international education. Additionally, Ankit implies that middle-class individuals who seek international education without a clear pathway to post-study employment overseas must have been ‘conned’. This assumption demonstrates how localised micro-categories of class can shape experiences of international education. Suburban strivers are perceived by agents/counsellors as economically motivated and are also assumed to possess less knowledge about how to navigate international education processes and are therefore more likely to fall victim to unscrupulous operators.

Assumptions that education professionals base on familial occupations and corresponding localised micro-categories of class also affect the advice they dispense to students and their families. Akash, an education counsellor with a similar educational background and business to Ankit (above), explained that he provides different advice on the basis of whether the prospective student belongs to a (suburban) professional or a (SoBo) business family:

The kids with big family businesses, they come back. ... So that's one thing that we obviously try to suss out. If this is a professional family coming in, then we won't recommend they go to a country where they can't get a job. So then US, Canada, Australia, Singapore are more likely than the UK.

Akash's assumptions about his clients informs the advice that his business provides prospective students and their families. This reinforces class-specific trends pertaining to where students from Mumbai go and what their aspirations are – or what agents/counsellors assume their aspirations should be. From the outset, the international education industry constructs and/or perpetuates distinctions that channel students into 'appropriate' international education pathways according to *perceived* class statuses. These pathways are, in turn, coloured by the education-migration policies of receiving countries, as we see in the UK example.

The notion of class-specific 'appropriate' educational pathways also impacts how counsellors or agents perceive study destinations. Tanmaya, an education counsellor working for a small company located in the inner-suburbs who is also a returned student, reflected Ankit and Akash's comments when she explained that the UK's changes to the Post-Study Work visa has restricted the 'value' of these degrees to the elite who do not intend to work overseas after graduating:

The UK Masters has lost its value. Most students would now think twice before they go there. So students who want to come back to India because they have a family business or something, these are the ones who go to UK. Or spoilt children! [laughs] ... The ones who go abroad to party, like, just for the sake of going outside. They go to UK. ... Then there's [those] who are really interested in studying, but they think twice before going to UK.

Tanmaya perceived that those seeking education in the UK belong primarily to the SoBo elite who have clearly defined career trajectories wherein they return to India and join the family business. The data presented in this section demonstrates that changes to



immigration policy can have significant implications for the international education sector (see Tuxen & Robertson, 2018).

While Suzanne Beech's (2018) participants who recruit for UK universities suggested that their student numbers had not been greatly affected by changes to the Post-Study Work visa, data collected in this study indicates that the "value" of the UK degree has declined because students are unlikely to be employed in the UK after graduating. As a result of these changes, for participants in Mumbai the UK has become a destination for the elite, or for those who are sold false dreams. This means that the 'middle' band of Indian students, who seek to build careers overseas and become tax paying members of that society, are turning to other study destinations. Despite the optimism of Beech's (2018) participants, it would appear likely that significant changes to visa programmes will impact the number of students from India who seek international education in the UK in the long term. If students are unable to accumulate the capital that they desire by studying in a particular country, then it is evident that they will seek to acquire this elsewhere. This means that suburban strivers are less likely to study in countries where employment and perhaps migration conditions are unfavourable because this contravenes their aspirations. SoBo elites, on the other hand, are more concerned with accumulating symbolic capital (discussed in Chapter Six), so the prestige associated with specific study destinations is more prominent in their decision-making processes than considerations around employment.

## CONCLUSION

By adopting an approach that considers the role of class status in relation to how prospective students access and experience the international education industry, this chapter has made a novel contribution to emerging literature on migration industries. I have argued that class status permeates both the function of Mumbai's international education industry and the ways in which prospective students receive the services provided by this industry, where differences in class correlate to unequal experiences. I have further argued that different class identities correlate to uneven experiences of this industry. For SoBo elites, who possess greater stores of accumulated capital, education counsellors are a resource they can pay to assist with decisions about international education. For the elite, counsellors are situated within a larger toolkit of individuals and

institutions that readily provide advice and information about international education. Conversely, suburban strivers are more reliant on the guidance of agents because they lack access to the toolkit that SoBo elites have. This chapter has thereby illuminated the ways in which a student's class status can render them more vulnerable to the trappings of international education industries.

This chapter has also demonstrated that class status is embedded within Mumbai's international education industry itself, wherein the class backgrounds of agents and counsellors are infused with the businesses that they operate. Counsellors occupy elite spaces, both in terms of their office spaces as well as their inherited class status that has allowed them to be transnationally mobile students, and they therefore attract elite clientele. On the other hand, agents lack capital that would allow them to become mobile, which permeates their businesses and the knowledge they impart to prospective international students who also lack inherited capital. Similarly, experiences of education loans are entangled with an individual's class status, wherein a vast majority of suburban strivers take out loans to fund their international education, while SoBo elites rarely obtain an education loan. This creates a divide in student experiences, wherein it is imperative for suburban strivers to secure a job in the host country in order to repay their loans, which puts this group under pressure that SoBo elites do not experience.

Class status also permeates Mumbai's international education industry in terms of the advice that agents and counsellors provide based on assumptions they make about the class status of their clients. In this instance, the UK's recent changes to the Post-Study Work visa have resulted in an increasing perception that the UK is a study destination only suited to the elite, because those of 'lesser' class status need to work overseas after they graduate in order to recoup expenses incurred by pursuing international education. Agents and counsellors thereby hierarchize study destinations by using assumptions about class to influence their advice.

Importantly, this chapter has begun to demonstrate why it is imperative to interrogate class nuances within international student mobilities. Too often, students are understood according to their nationality or their study destination, which fails to attend to how issues of class (and other identities, such as gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) may impact mobility/immobility *within* student bodies. Attending to this can reveal

inequalities and disadvantage that are potentially hidden by examining student bodies as relatively homogenous. This chapter has demonstrated a need for scholarly work concerning student mobility to more closely consider class status and the ways in which the (re)production of status permeates and shapes both student mobilities and the industries that cater to these aspirations. In the next chapter, I will apply a similar lens to examining how prospective students imagined the value of international education and how these imaginaries are coloured by localised micro-categories of class.



## CHAPTER SIX

### **‘IT’S ABOUT EXPOSURE’: ACCUMULATING COSMOPOLITAN CULTURAL CAPITAL VIA INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION**

“The point of going abroad is not education. It’s about exposure. Exposure to *life*.”

– Mohit, male, 22, SoBo elite returned student

The notion of ‘gaining exposure’ was central to how students in the study imagined the value of and made decisions about international education. As Mohit’s comment suggests, the conventional education component of studying overseas was often perceived as secondary to the ‘exposure’ that one stands to gain (or be perceived to have gained). Although ‘exposure’ was mentioned in almost every interview, closer analysis reveals that exposure appears to be valued differently and represents different possibilities within the lifecourse according to a prospective student’s localised micro-category of class. This chapter demonstrates that suburban strivers imagine that international education will have a transformative impact on their lives by allowing them to acquire better education, better jobs and therefore better lifestyles and livelihoods. SoBo elites, on the other hand, anticipated that they would self-actualise by gaining exposure via international education. Importantly, and unlike the suburban strivers, SoBo elites did not perceive that exposure would correlate to economic gain. Rather, SoBo elites remarked that gaining exposure is central to their development as (elite) young adults and would carry symbolic value associated with prestige and taste rather than ‘tangible’ economic benefits. In this sense, for the SoBo elites going abroad is *presupposed*, while for suburban strivers international education is *aspirational*.

As outlined in Chapter Two, I conceptualise ‘exposure’ as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital; this chapter will demonstrate that in this empirical context gaining exposure is an exercise in accumulating cosmopolitan cultural capital. Exposure was understood by participants as something that can be embodied, experienced and possessed as a result of specific global, cosmopolitan activities undertaken by the individual. As such, exposure was not often framed by participants as an outcome of international

education itself, but rather as a by-product of education derived from the circumstances in which one is educated. Thus, someone who engages with international education does not necessarily acquire more exposure because of the foreign degree, but rather because of the international work experience they attain, the people they share their international education experiences with, the country in which they study, and the leisure activities they undertake in conjunction with their education. This contradicts Igarashi and Saito's (2014) assertion that educational qualifications are central to accumulating cosmopolitan cultural capital, although educational experiences in the form of 'practical' education were also cited by some suburban striver participants as a key way to gain exposure. For the vast majority of my participants, *experiences* related to international education were paramount, which is much like Shamus Khan's (2011) students at an elite boarding school in the US, who asserted that the most valuable knowledge was corporeal and derived from living away from home at the school. Although the word 'exposure' itself appears to be unique to the Indian context, gaining cosmopolitan cultural capital is central to how youths around the world seek to distinguish themselves in increasingly competitive global environments (for example, see Brooks et al., 2012; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Waters, 2005, 2006a; Khan, 2011).

Responding to Don Weenink's (2008: 1104) call to turn our attention to "which social groups are able to determine the rules of the appropriate forms of cosmopolitan behaviour", the analysis in this chapter demonstrates how exposure as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital is used to negotiate class boundaries and to hierarchize embodiments of cosmopolitan cultural capital, revealing uneven experiences pertaining to international education. This chapter first explores how cosmopolitan cultural capital is accumulated prior to international education via the high schools that participants attended and international leisure travel. I then show that exposure carries an economic imperative for suburban strivers, as they seek to acquire 'practical' education and workplace experience that they expect will result in career advancement and upward socio-economic mobility. This is contrary to the aspirations of SoBo elites, who imagine international exposure as a vehicle for self-actualisation and assign a primarily symbolic value to international education. SoBo elites also use their symbolic valuation of international education as evidence of their superior cosmopolitan cultural capital, which they use to negotiate class boundaries between themselves and suburban strivers. Last, I

explore how suburban strivers' desire for upward socio-economic mobility can also be limited for women from suburban striver families. Importantly, this chapter's focus on the imaginaries and expectations of prospective students reveals that economic advantages matter more to some international students than other, and that students from non-Western backgrounds also seek international mobility experiences in order to self-actualise.

## **GROWING UP, GAINING EXPOSURE**

Although participants imagined exposure primarily in relation to international education, they also revealed ways in which experiences in their formative years allowed them to 'become exposed'. This section demonstrates that SoBo elites are better positioned to accumulate cosmopolitan cultural capital prior to engaging with international education, primarily via the high schools they attend and international leisure travel. Suburban strivers increasingly seek to send their children to international schools and take international family holidays, however, they are more likely to encounter hurdles as they seek to accumulate cosmopolitan cultural capital.

### **International High Schools**

Few institutions hold greater power in producing young people with internationally mobile agendas than the high schools that they attend. In recent years, many non-Western countries have witnessed substantial growth in the availability of international curricula within their national boundaries, especially the European International Baccalaureate (IB) and British GCSEs/A-Levels (Rizvi, 2014; Kenway et al. 2017). In the Indian context, completing an international curriculum is often expected to facilitate access to international tertiary education, and is viewed as a 'better' education than the local curricula (Rizvi, 2005, 2014). In the present study, there was a stark line drawn between the schools that SoBo elite students attended versus those of suburban strivers. All SoBo elites attended elite international high schools<sup>32</sup> that typically delivered the IB curriculum. They were either old schools that SoBo elites have been attending for

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<sup>32</sup> As Gilbertson (2014c) notes, what qualifies as an 'international' school in India can be unclear. In this study, I follow my participants in understanding international schools as privately run schools that deliver an international curriculum, usually the IB or A Levels. There are, however, different levels of exclusivity assigned to international schools in Mumbai (as the main text discusses).

generations in South Mumbai or were newly established international schools with exceptional facilities located in Bandra Kurla Complex. With one exception, all suburban striver students attended schools in their local area. Some were international schools but lacked the reputation, facilities and corresponding expense of the schools attended by SoBo elites. Other schools attended by suburban strivers administered the Indian CBSE curriculum.

SoBo elite participants described the ‘exposure’ that their schools provided in relation to preparing students to desire and successfully access international education. Scholars have similarly claimed that these ‘international’ curricula give rise to new forms of cosmopolitan learning within non-Western contexts, particularly in relation to producing students with ‘global mindedness’ (Gilbertson, 2016; Sancho, 2015; Rizvi, 2014). However, not all students engaging with international education at the tertiary level have access to international curricula at the high school level, which produces unequal opportunity in relation to obtaining reliable information about tertiary international education as well as the ability to accumulate cosmopolitan cultural capital in India. In this instance, inequalities are typically framed by participants in terms of differing amounts of ‘exposure’ (i.e. cosmopolitan cultural capital) that one possesses prior to engaging with international education.

SoBo elites frequently described how they were ‘prepared’ by their school environments to pursue international education after completing high school. Umang, 22, a SoBo elite who attended one of Mumbai’s top international schools, had completed the GCSE in the tenth standard followed by the IB in his twelfth. He explained that his school had ‘trained’ him to enter a Western university:

Because we were all taken away from the Indian system of education, we were all preparing to go abroad. So, we had a guidance counsellor in school, we were encouraged to give our SATs, we were exposed to university visits from the US, Canada, UK, Australia, Singapore ... We had visits from a wide array of universities, but they were all average or above average, and then we had some *really* good ones come and speak – Ivy Leagues, Oxford, Cambridge, a couple of prominent Singaporean universities. Then we have one-on-one sessions with the guidance counsellors who look at our grades, our extra-curriculars, and they will tell us where we should be looking to apply. We’d have meetings with them and our parents, so they can guide us and take parents’ concerns into consideration. ... Because of the system of education



we went through, we were getting trained to study in the American system, or generally a Western university.

The facilities and opportunities provided by Umang's school allowed him, and his parents, to become exposed to information about international education. He explained that this assisted their family in making 'good' decisions about studying in America and that having studied the IB curriculum in a competitive environment allowed him to transition to university with relative ease. This suggests that engagement with international education commences much earlier for students from SoBo elite families who attend elite schools. These schools provide literacy in the international education industry that promotes foreign degrees and teaches students how to access them.

Students that attend elite schools are also prepared to engage with international education through 'service learning' (Rizvi, 2015), in which students are provided with opportunities to develop personal portfolios that are then used to apply to universities overseas, particularly in America. In a recent seminar, Rizvi (2017) discussed the notion of 'portfolioisation', in which school-led philanthropic initiatives provide elite students with tailored opportunities that later function as a key element of their university application essays wherein students are able to discuss their (supposed) altruism. In this sense, elite schools provide opportunities to their students that allow them to convert their economic capital (used to purchase elite education) into other forms of social and cultural capital that then reproduce privilege by providing elite students with stronger university résumés (see also Khan, 2011).

In the present study, instances of school-led initiatives to diversify the experiences of students most commonly involved opportunities for students to accumulate cosmopolitan cultural capital through international exposure. For instance, Anupama, 25, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, described the annual overseas study trips that her elite international school made available for purchase:

What happens in schools is they have these trips or 'picnics' as they call them, and they are all abroad nowadays. ... The schools are charging about 10 lakh rupees, and then they will take you somewhere in Europe or America so that you can see how it works over there. ... On my trip [to France], they took us to schools and universities so that we could see and interact over there.

For SoBo elites, overseas study trips are seen as crucial preparation that elite international schools provide to students, who they uniformly encourage to seek international tertiary education. Overseas study trips encourage elite students to accumulate cosmopolitan cultural capital, which prepares them to engage with international education.

It is access to activities like overseas study trips that contribute to the unequal accumulation of ‘exposure’ among (prospective) international students. No suburban striver participants described the ways in which their school had prepared them to access international education. In fact, many were critical of the lack of access to information that their schools provided, leaving them to pursue international education without assistance from the school. For instance, Simrat, 22, a returned student from a suburban striver family, explained that the ‘international’ school (cf. Gilbertson, 2014c) she attended in Mumbai’s suburbs did not deliver the exposure that she expected:

My parents moved me and my brother across to this international school so that we could study the IB because we both wanted to study abroad. But honestly, like, it was such a disappointment. ... The teaching was bad, and they didn’t even have a proper careers counsellor. ... They told my parents that they would prepare us to go abroad, but really all they did was teach the IB. And not even well!

Simrat went on to explain that, because she felt unsupported by her school, she had sought advice from an education agent who had encouraged her to apply to universities in the UK which she later discovered were substandard (as discussed in Chapter Five). Simrat’s lack of exposure left her vulnerable because she lacked access to reliable information that is provided to SoBo elites by the schools they attend (as well as their networks and other forms of capital that SoBo elites have accumulated in greater amounts). Herein lies a clear example of class boundaries at play: two students have attended international schools in Mumbai, but have graduated with vastly different stores of capital (cosmopolitan and otherwise), which means they engage differently and unevenly with the international education industry (again, as discussed in Chapter Five).

Despite widely held assumptions among participants about the benefits of international curricula, several respondents observed that studying the IB or other international curricula did not have guaranteed outcomes for international education. In some instances, respondents from suburban striver families, like Simrat (above),

explained that their switch to the IB curriculum had been problematic. Two suburban striver participants had failed their IB exams, which placed them at a disadvantage when applying to foreign universities. Sudamini, a SoBo elite who works as a school-based education counsellor at a suburban international high school explained her exasperation with parents who assumed that enrolling their children into IB schools would ensure their successful entrance to prestigious foreign institutions:

There are some elite schools that really push the kids to apply abroad. Like, it's not the done thing if you don't apply abroad. ... But I think there's this false sense among parents that, 'If I send my kid to an IB school, it's an international education'. ... And there's this false idea that, 'If I go to an international school then I'll get into a top university, an *Ivy League*'. Everyone has heard of 'Ivy League', but they may not understand what it means. ... I think a lot of people, they're like 'Oh my kid is going to apply to all the Ivy Leagues' and these kids have absolutely no potential.

Sudamini clarified that a student's marks might be adequate but they lack extra-curricular accomplishments that are crucial to succeeding in applications to elite American colleges – which elite schools provide via service learning and portfolioisation (Rizvi, 2015, 2017). Sudamini's comments suggest that familial stores of cosmopolitan cultural capital are important in managing the process of engaging with international education. If parents are 'exposed' in the right ways then – like Sudamini – they would know to coach their children towards successful applications, rather than holding misplaced beliefs that IB schools provide linear pathways to elite foreign institutions.

This is an example of how the (successful) marketing of forms of international education can lead to widespread desirability of an educational product (such as IB qualifications or foreign degrees), which can simultaneously reveal unevenness in the capital that families possess which allows them to successfully consume international education. There are stark differences in the way that SoBo elites are educated compared to suburban strivers, particularly the amount of exposure that each group is able to accumulate during their schooling, which can impact how international education is experienced according to localised micro-categories of class.

Additionally, there are also differences in the education of previous generations which make SoBo elite parents more knowledgeable about the current education market and how best to navigate it to secure the best outcomes for the next generation. SoBo elite

parents had typically attended English-medium schools in the more affluent areas of Mumbai, and several had also studied abroad during the 1970s and 1980s when student mobility out of India was less common (Chow & Chambers, 2015). Although these participants did not typically cite this as an advantage, scholarly literature has comprehensively demonstrated that the education of parents can significantly and positively impact their children (for example, see Sancho, 2013; Bok, 2010; De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaykamp, 2000; Waters, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Horst, 2015; Bowers-Brown, 2015). As Findlay et al. (2017: 192) argue, an individual's mobility trajectories are affected by "pre-study life planning and the cultural significance of mobility embedded in people's place of origin", which also relates to the home environment.

### **International Travel for Leisure**

Travelling internationally for leisure was consistently identified by respondents as a marker of upper-middle-class or elite status, as well as a key site through which cosmopolitan cultural capital is accumulated. However, as Massey (1994) points out, some groups of people are more geographically mobile than others, and have more diverse choices about how to be(come) mobile, which reproduces power (see also Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Brooks & Waters, 2010; Prazeres et al., 2017; Carlson, 2013; Cresswell, 2001, 2010). Indeed, as Cohen, Duncan & Thulemark (2015) argue, "lifestyle choices and forms of mobility increasingly co-mingle in ways that can be crucial to the lives of those who are privileged enough to access them" (157-8). Cohen et al. argue elsewhere (2013) that privileged individuals often see mobility as part of the everyday, as familiar and taken-for-granted to some extent. This obscures the power that is embedded within mobility as a 'lifestyle choice' (see also Skeggs, 2004).

In the present study, almost 80% of students in the sample had travelled internationally for leisure prior to embarking on their international education, implying that – on the whole – this is a relatively privileged group. However, participants did not experience international leisure travel in the same way. The SoBo elite suggested that suburban strivers are able to travel internationally, but they travel to different destinations and do so on a stricter budget. Suburban strivers were similarly aware of this difference, and they tended to describe it as an example of the SoBo elite's excesses and/or snobbery.

International mobility for leisure is an act of consumption that participants use as a marker of distinction by ‘legitimising’ cosmopolitan cultural capital (see also Gilbertson, 2016).

How and where one travels internationally are used as indicators of anticipated, assumed or accumulated cosmopolitan cultural capital. Reflecting previous criticism of SoBo elites described in the ‘willingness to spend’ section in Chapter Four, Neha, 18, a prospective student from a suburban striver family, suggested that those from South Mumbai spend excessively when they travel:

People from South Mumbai, they go abroad and they just spend money like it’s water. ... They go on expensive holidays all the time, they stay in five star hotels and eat out at fancy places. Maybe they even fly business class! It’s really a lot, it’s too much I think.

Neha notes several markers of what she believes is an excessive international holiday: flying business class, staying in five star hotels and fine dining. Neha locates herself as a ‘sensible’ consumer, differentiating herself from the SoBo elite who indulge ‘too much’. Similarly, Krupa, 25, also a prospective student from a suburban striver family, explained the difference between herself as a ‘middle-class’ person and ‘townies’ from South Mumbai:

I live in a middle-class community, so here it is like, only the people who can afford it can go, I guess like my family. So it’s not that flashy. But I have some friends who are from a higher different community and they are used to going – they go for overseas tours every year. This is the townie mindset: that you can’t take holidays in India. ... Once I suggested to my friend that she could go to the [Himalayan] hills and she just laughed at me. She was like, ‘please, I will go to the French Alps’. ... Townies always think that they are too good for India.

Like Neha, Krupa differentiates and distances herself from the SoBo elite by criticising their access to international travel, casting it as ‘flashy’ and asserting that the SoBo elite ‘think they are too good for India’. For suburban strivers, who cannot afford to travel in the same way as SoBo elites, this style of leisure is wasteful.

SoBo elites, however, did not perceive their international trips as excessive or wasteful. For them, travel is about gaining exposure in the best possible (i.e. most exclusive) environments, which allows them to become ‘more open-minded’. SoBo elites delineated hierarchal international destinations, wherein Europe and North America were

imagined as the centre of high culture and therefore better exposure, while regional Asian or Middle Eastern destinations were imagined as lesser (see also Weenink, 2008). In fact, while SoBo elites often travel within Asia and the Middle East for weddings or to visit family, none of these participants spoke about gaining exposure there. Rather, *legitimate* exposure was imagined to be accumulated solely in the West. A comment from Antara, 24, an education counsellor who attended an elite IB high school, demonstrates these distinctions:

People from town are probably more likely to go abroad for family holidays, so they have more exposure to foreign countries and are more open minded in that respect. That is not to say that people from the suburbs don't go for overseas holidays as well, they do. But I think they're less likely to go, and then they're more likely to go to, say, Bangkok rather than Paris.

Antara's comment illustrates assumptions about the type of international travel that SoBo elites are able to access compared to the suburban strivers, and that SoBo elites accumulate more cosmopolitan cultural capital in the process. SoBo elites are assumed to travel more frequently and to exotic destinations in the West, such as Paris. Conversely, suburban strivers take international holidays less often and they travel to (what SoBo elites consider) second tier destinations in Asia, such as Bangkok. This implies that frequency and destination of international travel demarks lines of distinction between these localised micro-categories of class.

Pre-existing exposure to the West via international holidays was identified by the SoBo elite as a key attribute that allowed them to confidently engage with international education (see also Prazeres et al., 2017; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). For instance, Sahil, 22, a SoBo elite returned student, explained that he and his peers transitioned comfortably into international education because they had prior exposure to the West:

Because we had all travelled a lot as kids it was pretty easy to go abroad to study. We all had exposure to America or Europe or wherever, so it wasn't so much of a jump to go and live there.

Exposure accumulated over the lifecourse – prior to international education – impacts how students belonging to different localised micro-categories of class engage with and experience international education. SoBo elites accumulate more cosmopolitan cultural capital than suburban strivers prior to departure, which – as the more powerful group –

allows them to deem which forms of cosmopolitan cultural capital are considered legitimate (see also Gilbertson, 2016). It is also likely that prior accumulation of cosmopolitan cultural capital allows SoBo elites to transition between school or work and studying overseas more smoothly than suburban strivers – as I will discuss later in this chapter. Furthermore, attending to the early experiences of prospective international students reveals that uneven experiences of international education begin to take shape well before students articulate their aspirations and expectations pertaining to studying overseas, which the next sections of this chapter explore in detail.

## **‘PRACTICAL’ EXPOSURE**

For suburban strivers, the primary value of ‘gaining exposure’ related to the economic imperative. This aligns with other studies of non-Western international students that find that upward socio-economic mobility is a central motivation for the movement of international students (Thomas, 2017; Kim, 2011; Baas, 2016; Upadhyay, 2016b; Sancho, 2017; Karupiah, 2018). For example, in their study of Indian students in Australia, Caluya et al. (2011: 94) argue that international education “operates as a commodity leading to the accumulation of other greater commodities – careers, upward mobility, marriage, and perhaps most prized of all, permanent residency.” These goals identified by Caluya et al. (2013) further highlight the importance of studying international student mobilities in the context of the lifecourse. Directing attention to mobilities *as they are imagined* contributes to forming a more complete picture where studies like Caluya et al.’s tend to focus on current students. In this section, I provide evidence that expands these studies by discussing the skills and knowledge that suburban strivers imagined they would gain via international education when they are at the pre-departure phase of their mobilities. Suburban strivers imagined ‘practical’ education and international workplace exposure as forms of cosmopolitan cultural capital that would later convert to other ‘greater’ forms of capital, namely economic capital by virtue of securing a better job.

Suburban strivers most often explained that a ‘practical’ education meant having the opportunity to test theoretical principles in real life by using specialised equipment, conducting research or lab work, and doing internships. They perceived that India does not offer such opportunities, so seeking international education would provide them with an enhanced learning experience. For instance, Bapu, 27, a suburban striver prospective

student stated that “abroad they teach you practical skills as well as theory” and that “in the US I will have the chance to work and to do practical classes so I will learn more”. As Raghuram (2013) similarly observes, skills and knowledge acquisition are a crucial component of student migration. Respondents imagined however that becoming knowledgeable and skilled can *only* occur outside India, positioning India as an inadequate site for the growth of young people who wish to reach their full potential. For suburban strivers, this growth was measured according to knowledge, skills and subsequent career success.

Imagining education overseas as superior also meant conceptualising Indian tertiary education as flawed. Many suburban striver participants had completed their undergraduate degree in India and were planning to pursue a master’s degree overseas. These students consistently lamented the quality of education they had received in India during their bachelor’s degrees, cited issues of rote learning, corruption and outdated curricula (see also Desai, 2008; Azmat et al., 2013; Altbach & Jayaram, 2009). Jignesh, 22, a suburban striver prospective student told me that “here it is just rote learning, it’s a joke!” Similarly, Swapnali, 21, a prospective student from a suburban striver family, explained that her desire to study overseas arose from the poor standard of education she felt she received in India:

My first primary goal is to get abroad, because only there will I get a good education. If you see my [university] syllabus until now, it is so silly. It’s so mediocre and it’s rote learning – and that is not what I want to do for the rest of my life. I want *knowledge*, I don’t just want ‘education’. And the only way I will get knowledge is if I go abroad.

The notion that the ‘only way’ to ‘get *knowledge*’ is by pursuing international education creates a binary that positions India in deficit and the English-speaking West as offering a superior experience. The desire for a ‘practical education’ and the Indian education system as flawed were persistent themes in interviews with suburban strivers. This was in stark contrast to the perspectives of the SoBo elites, who rarely mentioned the Indian education system and did not characterise international education as a site of ‘practical’ education (their responses are discussed below). It is apparent that localised micro-categories of class shape how prospective students imagine the education they will receive overseas, as well as the longer-term value of international education. For suburban



strivers, the longer-term benefits of international education centred on upward career (and therefore socio-economic) mobility.

Prospective students from suburban striver families imagined gaining international ‘exposure’ in foreign workplaces as a crucial component of their international education. International workplace exposure appeared to function as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital that suburban strivers intended to convert into career opportunities. Specifically, exposure was perceived as a key strategy to ensure professional distinction upon return to India, which suburban strivers anticipated would convert to a ‘good package’ in terms of salary and benefits (see also Kim, 2011). As Ashish, 18, a suburban striver intending to study computer science explained, “the [workplace] exposure that you get over there is second-to-none. So if you study and then work in abroad, then you can come back here and get a really good package.” Though working overseas was seen as crucial, prospective students almost always imagined that their careers would involve working in India eventually. Rohit, 23, from a suburban striver family, expected that his career opportunities in India would be greatly enhanced by having worked abroad for several years:

If I have a foreign master’s and a work experience over there of five years, and then there is another [candidate] who has an experience of five years in an Indian IT company, and both of us are having the same [educational] specialisation, the preference from HR will be given to me because I have international exposure. I will know how the things work internationally, so I will also get a good package if I come back over here.

Interestingly, international exposure is perceived as most valuable in India, where it promises to mark the individual as more cosmopolitan than workplace competitors who have not spent time overseas. This creates a professional class who has accumulated cosmopolitan cultural capital overseas but perceives that they are only able to ‘cash in’ once they return to India. In turn, the expectation that a foreign degree will result in career advancement obscures an individual’s privilege by misrepresenting it as merit (as discussed in Chapter Two). In this empirical case, international education is expected to help an individual obtain a job because the capital associated with foreign credentials is valorised (Waters, 2009).

Suburban strivers seek to acquire cosmopolitan cultural capital as they jostle for a dominant position in an increasingly global India, where a demonstrable openness to others and global connectedness are thought to be desirable traits in an employee (see also Weenink, 2008; Igarashi & Saito, 2014; Kim, 2011). Karan, a university representative working for an Australian institution and himself a returned student, explained that it is not possible to gain within India the exposure necessary for upward career mobility. Thus, one must venture overseas in order to be competitive in the Indian job market (though these are, of course, the words of a professional who sells international education for a living):

We're not getting international exposure as part of our undergraduation, so most of us want to go abroad to get that exposure. ... It's important to have international exposure because India is becoming an increasingly larger global economy. We need to stand up to that expectation from the recruiter's point of view as well. If you have that exposure, then you get slightly more preference from the recruiters in India.

Karan's comment suggests that employers within India value the international graduate above the local graduate, which again perpetuates class-based advantage wherein those who can afford international education are able to distinguish themselves from others who cannot afford to study overseas. Herein lies a suggestion that India is 'becoming global' and young people must therefore 'become global' in order to succeed professionally in India, yet they are unable to 'become global' *in* India. The implication is that India's (or perhaps Mumbai's) 'ascension' to become a 'global' place is dependent on young people spending time overseas.

In the present study, participants consistently imagined India as lacking diversity or challenges that would allow them 'grow'. They subsequently pursued international education as a remedy, which participants intended to leverage upon return to India for professional or – in the case of SoBo elites (discussed below and in Part Two) – personal gain. In order for international education to provide the rewards that respondents anticipated, potential employers as well as the community at large must associate foreign degrees with merit in order to disguise the fact that only relatively privileged Indians can access international education. The perceived need to spend time abroad to gain the prerequisite competencies to be 'successful' paints a picture of India as a site of deficit – a far cry from the notion of an 'India shining' put forward by the local media and

government (Biswas, 2004; see also Brosius, 2010; Patel, 2013), or from narratives of India as an emerging superpower in global geopolitics (Forbes, 2015; Stuenkel, 2012). Thus, to truly ‘become’ the *right* kind of Indian adult, one must be exposed to life in the West.

## IMAGINING UPWARD SOCIO-ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Participants from suburban striver backgrounds consistently imagined that gaining exposure via international education would facilitate upward socio-economic mobility. As mentioned in Chapter Two, mobilities literature has often drawn a relationship between non-Western international student mobilities and (the possibility of) upward mobility (for example, see Baas, 2010; Sancho, 2017; Tran, 2016; Karupiah, 2018; Raghuram, 2013; Holloway, O’Hara & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012; Thomas, 2017; Upadhyya, 2016b; Hussain, 2018). Johanna Waters’ work (2004; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; with Brooks, 2011; with Leung, 2013a, 2017a, 2017b) has been particularly influential in this field. She demonstrates the relationship between transnational student mobility and the mobility of their families from East Asia and the accumulation of various forms of capital, especially cultural capital. Throughout many of her publications Waters (2005, 2006a, 2009, 2018; with Leung, 2017a) argues that international education embodies, or is assumed to embody, significant international value in both business and professional spheres for transnationally mobile young people. Her participants sought to accumulate and/or augment capital as a strategy to realise upward mobility via enhanced job prospects, familial migration strategies, and geographic mobility. Holloway et al. (2012: 2286) see their Kazakhstani participants operating in similar ways to Waters’ East Asians, arguing that “acquiring cultural capital through overseas education is one way in which these young people ... seek to (re)produce economically advantaged middle-class status”. This resonates with suburban strivers’ narratives detailed above and in this section, wherein they imagine enhanced career opportunities by accumulating ‘exposure’ via international education, which will not only enable them to reproduce their existing status but also holds the possibility of upward socio-economic mobility.

However, while many of these authors acknowledge the class status of their participants, usually as ‘middle-class’, scholars rarely drill down into class nuances within their samples. For instance, Holloway et al. (2012: 2286) mention a desire to

“(re)produce economically advanced middle-class status”, but it is unclear what middle-class status actually means or represents. In this section as well as those below, I demonstrate that economic advantages (which the studies listed above assume non-Western students desire) matter more to some international students than others – namely, suburban strivers seek to derive economic rewards from their transnational mobility, while SoBo elites desire the symbolic value of having spent time overseas.

Espoused by parents of prospective students as well as students themselves, narratives in which upward socio-economic mobility was a central goal often outlined a linear and sequential trajectory consisting of geographic mobility, education, work overseas, return to India, resulting in upward socio-economic mobility. For instance, Saili, mother of a prospective student from a suburban striver family, explained that international education provides a pathway ‘to have a beautiful life’ by virtue of ‘making your career best possible’:

Education is the first priority, ok, they should be getting the best education. Then, job prospects. Once they are through with their degree, they get a job immediately, and for how much money will they earn. ... Because anybody and everybody would feel that, yes, we should be getting a good job placement so that we can live a better life. Why you have gone outside to study? Why have you spent 30 or 40 lakhs [US\$40-60,000]? Because there is some reason behind that – not to just study, but also to make your career best possible, and to have a beautiful life after that.

By suggesting that the motivation to seek international education is ‘not to just study’ but rather to enhance one’s career, Saili differs from SoBo elites discussed below, who imagine international education primarily as an ‘experience’ that will allow them ‘grow’ by gaining exposure. The notion that a ‘better life’ will result from international education implies that suburban strivers are more invested in ensuring that they derive tangible benefits from spending time overseas, resulting in different class-based ideas about the value of exposure as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital.

Prospective suburban striver students in the sample similarly perceived that international education would allow them to secure better jobs, which would result in ‘improved status’ and an ‘easier path’. As Ashish, 18, explained:

We upper-middle-class people have to jump to be rich. ... That’s where education comes in, because the more educated you are, the better job you get.

So if you get a better job, then your path becomes easier. You improve your status.

Ashish's comment suggests that he perceived a possibility to become 'rich' if he is able to 'jump' high enough. This is the promise of international education and the basis on which it is sold to prospective students (as indicated by agents, counsellors and university representatives quoted throughout this study). Similarly, parents from the suburbs often imagined that purchasing international education for their children would provide a pathway out of their current class status in India. Priyanka, a suburban striver mother and education agent, clarified why she decided to send her sons to Canada to study accounting:

See, everybody wants education, because you are so tired of becoming a sandwich for everything, so you don't want your children to be that, right? ... We just [want to] get them out of the middle class and make their life better so that they don't spend their whole life like this. Just to make life more better, so we send them abroad.

Priyanka imagined that her sons' international education will improve their livelihoods in a manner that being 'middle-class' in Mumbai cannot guarantee, and which she has not experienced in her own life. This also implies that belonging to the middle-class is not desirable, contrary to other studies in which interlocutors proudly declare their middleclassness as a badge of superiority (for example, see Dickey, 2016; Upadhya, 2016a; Gilbertson, 2017a). Furthermore, it is evident that parents aspire for their children to have a 'better life' than their generation by affording opportunities that were unavailable to them when they were younger presumably because they had lower stores of capital and have since accrued enough capital (economic and otherwise) to facilitate international education for their children.

Intergenerational aspirations are also reflected in David Sancho's (2013, 2015) work on Kerala's middle class, where he describes parental 'aspirational regimes' that hinge on the academic success of their children. Sancho argues that families accumulate capital over generations, and in the 'new' post-economic liberalisation India they set out to convert their economic capital into educational capital in order to then reconvert into prestige and economic gain. As Sancho states, "the attainment of ... middle-class status is supported by the child's success, or destroyed by the child's failure to acquire the necessary skills and credentials. As elsewhere in India, parents live in hope that their sons and daughters will somehow (re)produce that position in the employment hierarchy, and

they realize with increasing urgency that to do so they must ensure the right education for their children” (2013: 163). In this study, international education is seen as the pathway to achieve the aspirations of parents as well as children.

As previously mentioned, prospective suburban striver students and their parents imagined that upward socio-economic mobility would occur when a young person returns to India to deploy newly acquired cosmopolitan cultural capital, rather than by remaining overseas. Anila, mother of a prospective student from a suburban striver family, explained that when a child studies abroad they are able to obtain a better job ‘package’ upon their return to India, which has the potential to raise the status of the family unit overall:

The child studies abroad, but that child may not settle abroad – not necessarily. That student may come back. But you know, how it is in India, a foreign degree means a lot. There’s a quite a good weightage attached to it. ... That weightage could land him a very good job with a good package, as we call it here – ‘the package’. And, um, if a person is working in a good company, he has access to other companies, other people, and also financially well-off, then of course, we do help our siblings and cousins and nephews – we do help them come up, educate them, find them better jobs.

Anila outlines a number of ways in which she imagines possessing a foreign degree will impact the life of a (male) graduate, namely a better job and access to social and/or professional networks. There are several things of note in relation to Anila’s comment and imaginaries of upward socio-economic mobility. First, despite the individualistic discourse of student participants, it is possible that parents maintain a more ‘traditional’ reciprocal approach to imagining how capital can be distributed among extended family members. This also relates to literature on international education and upward socio-economic mobility as a family project (Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Carlson, Gerhards & Hans, 2017; Ong, 1999; Brooks & Waters, 2010; Sancho, 2013, 2015). For example, Waters (2005, 2006a) demonstrates how some middle-class Chinese families seek to accumulate cultural capital via children who study overseas, which is used as a household strategy to achieve upward socio-economic mobility as well as transnational mobility for the family unit. Waters (2005: 366) further observes that “middle-class status is increasingly wedded to the possession of formal qualifications”, which also appears to be the case for suburban strivers in this study. Second, similar to Saili (above), Anila’s comment implies that suburban strivers attach more ‘weight’ to acquiring a foreign degree because it has the perceived potential to benefit multiple generations of one family. This

stands in stark contrast to SoBo elites (below), who did not mention any advantages arising from their international education that would apply beyond individual gains. Third, there is a gendered element to Anila's comment – she uses male pronouns and mentions nephews but not nieces – which reflects a persistent cultural expectation that men become the primary breadwinners and their education is thus often privileged over that of girls/women (Hill et al., 2006; Ramanchandran, 2012).

These benefits that suburban strivers expected to gain from an international education are also largely in keeping with existing literature on international students (Findlay et al., 2005; Robertson, Hoare & Harwood, 2011; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008). For example, Marcu (2015) has suggested that Eastern European students studying in Western Europe seek to 'enter an international career' and continue their internationally mobile trajectories. While Findlay et al. (2017) found that where students originate from can have a significant impact on what they seek to gain from international education, but a desire for career advancement was constant across all students. In their study, North American and European students saw international education as an opportunity for world travel as well as a logical step in their career progression. Whereas students from 'less economically advantaged countries' saw international education "as a way out of a precarious economic situation for the whole family, and it should not have therefore been surprising to find that the realisation of this involved parents encouraging onward post-study mobility to achieve a potentially lucrative international career" (2017: 196). In this study, suburban strivers reflect the latter trajectories of those students in more economically precarious positions. For this group, gaining 'practical exposure' held the promise of upward socio-economic mobility and was the central aim for suburban strivers. However, as the next section discusses, SoBo elites tended to view international education as an opportunity for world travel and self-actualisation, which is more in keeping with the trajectories of Findlay et al.'s (2017) North American and European students who presumably represent a more privileged mobility experience.

## **SELF-ACTUALISATION AND THE SYMBOLIC VALUE OF EXPOSURE**

The pursuit of personal growth through travel has been well documented in relation to predominantly White Westerners seeking experiences abroad, most often in the Global South (Findlay et al., 2006; Waters & Brooks, 2011). Studying Australian and

New Zealander travellers, Wilson and Harris (2006: 162) identify ‘meaningful travel’ as “a travel experience which sees individuals searching for or finding an increased sense of self-confidence and empowerment, considering their options and perspectives of life, and thinking (or re-thinking) their relationships with society and others.” Similarly, Prazeres (2017) observes that for her Canadian participants travel is a ‘meaningful journey’ that encompasses self-discovery and a step outside the comfort zone. Other scholars also demonstrate connections between international mobility, a desire for ‘growth’ or ‘self-discovery’ and youth (Carlson, 2013; Collins & Shubin, 2015; van ‘t Klooster et al., 2008). However, as Prazeres (2017: 908) argues, few studies have considered “the conceptual and geographical underpinnings of self-discovery and self-development.”

Prazeres’ (2017) study unpacks these topics in relation to Canadian students on short term exchanges or placements in non-Western countries, thereby reproducing scholarly tendencies to focus on privileged mobilities from the West to non-West or within the West. There is a need to break down this binary that positions Western youth mobility as ‘self-actualisation’ and non-Western youth mobility as ‘economic’ (see also Collins & Shubin, 2015). The data presented in this section speak to this need, wherein elite non-Western students explain their desire to self-actualise via international education in the West, over and above any career or economic benefits. For SoBo elites, self-actualisation is imagined as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital that then holds symbolic value upon return to India.

SoBo elite participants often assumed that they were most likely to travel internationally for education and this was driven by their ‘need’ to ‘experience’ the West. Geeta, 22, from a SoBo elite family, explained that she ‘has needs for self-actualisation’ which must be realised through travel, but those below her in Mumbai’s class hierarchy are presumed to be driven by economic necessities and so Indian tertiary education should satisfy their ‘requirements’:

I think in South Bombay, people understand that ‘I want to go there for the experience’ and we’re willing to pay for that. ... We’re the 10% of people in India who have disposable income. I think that for the remaining 90%, whatever they’re doing here in India – studying – is fine because as long as they’re getting their jobs they’re happy and I think that’s good for them. But we have needs that are a little bit beyond just getting ‘the job’, beyond the fundamentals. We have needs for, you know, self-actualisation and I want to



be able to explore that through travel. It's important. But I think for someone who can't afford it, it makes sense for them to study here because they're getting a decent quality of education, at least as far as their job requirement goes.

Geeta implies that the elite have complex desires to develop their selves, in contrast to the more 'simplistic' desires of those who cannot afford to be transnationally mobile. Geeta assumes that middle-class aspirations extend only as far as gainful employment and do not involve 'self-actualisation'. In making this assumption Geeta judges the character of the relatively disadvantaged, displaying her marks of privilege to suggest that the close-mindedness of the disadvantaged limits their ability to pursue opportunities within a globalised world (for a similar example see Khan, 2011). She thus maintains distance between herself as an elite member of society and the 'rest' by legitimising her 'need' to be transnationally mobile.

SoBo elite parents shared the perception that spending time overseas via international education will allow their children to self-actualise. For parents, like SoBo elite students, education and career advancement were secondary to personal growth. For instance, Palaq, a SoBo elite mother of a prospective student, explained that in order for her son to 'complete his education' and gain 'global exposure' he must spend time overseas:

I feel that exposure abroad is always best. It will give him the opportunity to open up another path over there. ... I feel a global perspective will broaden his horizon, because my father always said that education is not complete until you travel. So I want him to travel, I want him to explore, I want him to make world-wide friends and have a global exposure and eventually settle down in his life wherever he would like to.

Palaq's description of why exposure is valuable reflects the options possessed by SoBo elites on the whole: her son can explore, develop himself by gaining exposure and then decide where to live and work (though in his interview her son stated that he will likely return to India to join the family business). The notion that travel is a form of education was only expressed by SoBo elite participants whose families had accumulated significant stores of cosmopolitan cultural capital through previous international exposure. This suggests that elite members of society often possess an older, intergenerational and distinctly colonial expectation that young people from a particular background journey abroad to be 'finished' before graduating into adulthood.

Respondents explained that young people who had completed an international education were perceptibly different in terms of their language skills, academic competencies, social attitudes (e.g. towards homosexuality or religion), maturity and independence. These competencies were understood to result from exposure to the West. In particular, education counsellors (not agents) promoted international education as a way to ‘make’ a young person independent. Ankit, an education counsellor catering to the SoBo elite, explained the value of international education as follows:

Overall it makes you independent, it’s a life changing decision, it makes you responsible, opens your mind up, makes you a world citizen and that’s why a foreign education – at a good institute – is something everyone should consider.

Similarly, Karan, an Australian university representative, explained the value of international education in relation to personal growth:

We all think twice about spending \$30,000 or \$40,000, but it’s worth it because it’s not only the educational aspect, it’s the personal aspect which is more important. You grow as a person, you’re more independent, you take your own decisions, at the same time you get a global exposure which is very important.

These are, of course, the party lines of seasoned professionals who sell international education for a living. However, selling international education in this manner valorises the importance of exposure for those who wish to become ‘independent’ and ‘open-minded’ ‘world citizens’, in keeping with the literature on cosmopolitan cultural capital (Weenink, 2007, 2008; Igarashi & Saito, 2014). The implication of this pitch is that those who remain in India lack the opportunity to become independent because they are not ‘exposed’ and have not accumulated a wide range of cultural experiences. However, becoming independent was not understood as a homogenous experience of being an international student. The SoBo elite were assumed to gain more from becoming independent, as this was an important element of their transition into adulthood.

When I probed what ‘being independent’ means and why it matters, respondents from SoBo elite backgrounds, as well as the international education professionals that cater to them, revealed class-specific dynamics around exposure as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital. Akash, an education counsellor catering primarily to South

Mumbai clients, explained that gaining exposure is about temporarily shedding the material benefits of being a SoBo elite in order to build ‘character’ and capabilities:

I think the kids who are going abroad, they come from pretty pampered lifestyles. In India, as you can imagine, everything is kind of spoon-fed, everything is given to them: their tuition teachers, their drivers, their maids. So it’s a very convenient place to live and it can spoil. ... Sending them abroad to just rough it out on their own – I know it comes at a cost – but you know, they’re doing their own laundry, they’re living in smaller rooms, they figure out how to use a washing machine. Most of them have never used a washing machine before, so they *do* become independent.

According to Akash, SoBo elite parents place value on their children experiencing (very relative) ‘hardship’ in the form of learning to take care of themselves as young adults. In fact, families *pay* for the privilege of experiencing hardship, which is assumed to produce adolescents who will be better prepared to become adults once their education concludes – reminiscent of Western elites who ‘rough it’ by ‘backpacking’ through non-Western countries as an ‘experience’ that leads to self-actualisation by temporarily suspending their privileged lifestyles (Noy, 2004; Bosangit, Hibbert & McCabe, 2015; Huxley, 2004). This ‘hardship’ also appears to function as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital, wherein ‘becoming independent’ is seen as a key attribute acquired by studying overseas which then converts to prestige or merit (symbolic capital) upon return to India.

For the vast majority of Indians, the economic capital required to pursue international education and obtain the ‘exposure’ that participants desire is beyond reach. As Igarashi and Saito (2014: 225) argue, the pursuit of cosmopolitan cultural capital requires sufficient access to economic resources and can thus be seen as “a new basis of exclusion” which the upper classes use to distinguish themselves from others. Being able to afford international education is an expectation within SoBo elite circles, which perpetuates elite status and encourages transnational mobility in order to maintain elite class identity. Nidhi, 20, a prospective student from a SoBo elite family, explained that within her social circles going overseas for international education was an established norm:

The norm now, especially in South Bombay – I don’t know about the rest of Bombay – but the little circle that I was in... Basically, if you’re from a private school and if you’re from a certain economic background, why *wouldn’t* you go abroad? That’s like, the *only* thing. It’s considered to have more value if you go abroad. The ‘foreign stamp’ as we say in Bombay. ... It is like a stamp

of richness, like, if you don't go abroad it's because you don't have enough money. They want to show that, 'Oh we have enough money and that's why we're sending our kids abroad to study'.

In Nidhi's SoBo elite circles, engaging with international education is a 'stamp of richness' that conveys the economic status of a family to others. Like most SoBo elite participants, Nidhi does not mention any benefits beyond the symbolic value of having studied overseas – 'the stamp' of belonging to the elite. The expectation that young people from SoBo elite families will travel abroad further (re)produces boundaries between localised micro-categories of class by influencing the educational aspirations of young people from specific circles. In turn, this also produces class-specific ideas about transitioning to adulthood, wherein studying overseas is presupposed for the SoBo elite if they are to become the 'right' sort of adult in India.

SoBo elites use the cost of sending a child abroad as a marker of educational prestige as well as a 'stamp of richness'. Lekha, a returned student from a SoBo elite family who also owns and runs a small education counselling business, explained that her clients are primarily concerned with the visibility of the degree they are purchasing for their children rather than the education itself:

People think that the more expensive a product is, the better it must be. This isn't necessarily true, but education is a bragging right here as much as it is an education. ... There is a certain amount of pride attached to a child's degree, for parents that is. Parents like to boast about their children. All my life I have heard parents boasting about where their son is studying in the US.

'Bragging' about international education at social occasions makes the consumption of international education visible to others in India, through which international education becomes a mode of distinction – in terms of what families can afford financially as well as the academic achievements of their children. Without parents' boasting, international education would be a less visible form of consumption in India – physical absence may be noted, but the specific achievements and activities of young people whilst abroad would otherwise be difficult to ascertain. This strongly reflects the discourse of merit discussed in the literature review (Radhakrishnan, 2011; Upadhyay, 2016a), in which the advantages of class are obscured when educational achievements are seen only as a result of hard work and talent.

The value of ‘the stamp’ of transnational mobility extends beyond marking the economic capital possessed by a family (this is also discussed in Part Two). Participants noted a correlation between being able to afford international education and becoming ‘fluent in foreign culture’. For instance, Nidhi’s mother, Hiral, explained that international education has divergent impacts on young people’s lives according to their localised class status in Mumbai:

It’s a status symbol. These [upper-class] kids have the finishing school accent, they are fluent in a certain way of life and foreign culture. It’s a social imprint; like, ‘I’m there and I can afford it’. But then I think it’s different for all classes. For the middle-class it’s a big step up, it changes their entire life – academically, socially and *especially* financially. It elevates their status. But for us in the upper-classes, it’s academically paramount that we go abroad but it doesn’t really improve much else.

Hiral suggests that for the SoBo elite international education is an important signifier of class maintenance but does not constitute an avenue for class mobility. A ‘social imprint’ is attained by the SoBo elite via international education, whereas international education ‘elevates the status’ of middle-class (i.e. suburban striver) students in a way that is not necessary for the SoBo elite. The implication is that, even though various class levels are engaging with the same international education product, the lines of distinction that studying abroad produces are class-specific. Because – unlike the suburban strivers – SoBo elites do not need their international education to have economic reward, they are in a position to emphasise the symbolic value of a foreign degree by recognising things like the ‘social imprint’ (i.e. cosmopolitan cultural capital) as the most important outcome of international education. In turn, this allows SoBo elites to sure-up their class position by ascribing higher value to symbolic outcomes and lower value to the economic outcomes that suburban strivers desire.

## NEGOTIATING CLASS BOUNDARIES

While suburban striver students and parents imagined that brighter futures would be facilitated by the attainment of foreign degrees, SoBo elite participants and the industry professionals that cater to them disputed whether international education can convert into *meaningful* upward socio-economic mobility for suburban strivers. By asserting their superior cultural capital, SoBo elites maintain localised class boundaries by denigrating suburban strivers on the basis of their ‘misplaced’ aspirations or their inability to

appropriately embody cosmopolitan cultural capital, despite their ability to access international education.

There were three key ways in which SoBo elites cast doubt on the ability of suburban strivers to achieve upward socio-economic mobility. First, SoBo elite participants commonly sought to downplay the significance of international education by pointing out that attaining a foreign degree is becoming normalised. Naina, 24, believed that the value of international education as a tool to distinguish a graduate from the crowd is diminished because more people are accessing this form of education:

I remember my mother telling me about a friend of hers who went abroad when they were young, that was very unusual. And her parents went around telling everyone that their daughter is studying abroad. It was such a huge thing to say. But now it's become like an everyday thing because so many people are doing it. So I think it kind of loses its value if you're doing it to stand out.

Naina states that attaining a foreign degree is no longer a marker of distinction because it lacks 'scarcity value' (Bourdieu, 1986). The implication that logically follows is that graduates holding foreign degrees must employ tactics to create distinction in other ways, which is where the pursuit of things like 'personal growth' and 'self-actualisation' come to prominence. SoBo elites thereby maintain their elite status by normalising the acquisition of foreign qualifications, but augmenting the value or importance of spending time overseas as a rite of passage into adulthood.

Second, SoBo elite respondents questioned the pre-existing knowledge and therefore the motivations of those with 'new money' who seek international education. Akash, an education counsellor and a returned student from a SoBo elite family, contended that as wealth rises in India more people seek international education, but this has – in his professional opinion – resulted in more people sending their children 'anywhere' to study. Unless international education is approached with due consideration, he argues, it does not 'add value' to the individual:

There's a lot more money that's come into people's hands. So I feel like, uh, the first thing they want to do is obviously get a bigger house, then they get a nice car, then they want to send their kids abroad to study. ... As people kind of started getting wealthier, they started seeing more value in studying overseas. ... But they don't always know what they're doing, uh, they just send the kids anywhere – and that doesn't add value.

Akash implies that people who have recently acquired wealth (i.e. suburban strivers) understand international education as an additional possession of sorts, which they anticipate will symbolise their achievement of upward class mobility. However, it must also be noted that Akash is legitimating himself as an education counsellor here – if suburban strivers hire a counsellor they would presumably not ‘just go anywhere’. Nonetheless, SoBo elite participants, like Akash, tended to view the educational attainments of suburban strivers as different (read: unequal) to their own because they were not accompanied by a requisite display of cosmopolitan cultural capital, such as foregrounding self-actualisation as we saw in the previous section. A foreign degree is therefore not ascribed with an even amount of worth because value is ascribed by the onlooker, not by the qualification itself.

Last, and in a similar vein to above, SoBo elites consistently implied that suburban strivers do not have the competences, comportment, tastes, skills or ideologies that would allow them to convert international education into ‘a good life’. Vidya, 25, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, suggested that people who ‘can’t afford it’ but who seek international education often have ‘misconceptions’ about the likelihood of their success:

I think a lot of middle-class people go abroad with the notion that it will give them a step-up in life, but you cannot blame anybody else except yourself for thinking that. ... You can't just assume that you will do this and have a bright future! ... They see other people's experiences, that this person went and now they have everything! But I think it doesn't just come from a degree. Even if you have gone there with a misconception – a wrong notion – if you are someone who can't afford it but went there to make a good life, you have to work really hard and you have to have the smarts to make it over there too.

Vidya, like other respondents in this section, seeks to undermine the imagined value that suburban striver students and their families ascribe to international education. SoBo elite participants were quick to detail the potential pitfalls of international education, whilst concurrently displaying their aptitude for not having succumbed to these hazards. This creates class distinction wherein suburban strivers do not acquire or perform the ‘correct’ skills and traits, at least according to SoBo elites.

SoBo elite participants were often critical of suburban strivers’ ability to embody cosmopolitan cultural capital, which had often been observed during their international education. Discussing their perception of others, SoBo elites held up evidence of their

own advanced, competent embodiment of cosmopolitan cultural capital that differentiated them from other Indian international students. In this sense, an individual's class status is transported across borders and used to distinguish Indians from various backgrounds even when they are outside the context in which their class status was originally made. By constructing their version of cosmopolitan cultural capital as legitimate and identifying that some people 'do it wrong', SoBo elite participants imply that exposure is accumulated over time and international education will therefore have uneven outcomes for international students depending on their localised micro-category of class.

Criticism of the way that suburban strivers behaved whilst they were studying in foreign institutions was one of the key ways that SoBo elites sought to define the legitimacy of their own cultural capital. For instance, several returned students from SoBo elite families mocked other Indian international students from less privileged backgrounds for taking pleasure in free giveaway items on campus. Divij, 23, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, ridiculed 'scholarship students' (the implication being that they could not otherwise afford a foreign degree) because they tended to take pleasure in 'smaller things':

There were also people who came on scholarships, and I think they enjoyed smaller things a lot more, like walking down the street or getting a free meal coupon, or a free [university] t-shirt. They really found a great thrill in that. I guess for them it's special.

Divij constructs an 'us' and 'them' relationship, differentiating on the basis of economic capital (scholarship vs. non-scholarship students), but also on the cultural capital that each group embodies. Scholarship students found a 'thrill' in receiving free things, whereas those with greater stores of cultural capital knew not to demonstrate excitement at 'inappropriate' junctures, which would undermine their ability to reproduce their existing class status. Further, the prior exposure that SoBo elite students have to 'walking down the street' in foreign countries (in which pavements do not have open drains and are rarely used as public toilets), means that they have already accumulated cosmopolitan cultural capital that allows them to not (openly) find simple pleasures 'special'.

A second key area of criticism that SoBo elite students made of their suburban striver peers concerned the way that they engaged – or rather, did not engage – with the



international education ‘experience’. Sahil, 22, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, described the ‘aspirational middle-class’ as those who are not willing or able to push themselves outside of their comfort zone whilst overseas:

S: In the aspirational middle-class, say if someone goes abroad, they might be a little conservative and they might not want to branch out to local people or, you know, go *outside* of what's known to them.

N: Why do you think that is?

S: I just think it's the sense of comfort that they have with their own Indian community. If it's someone from Bombay or Bangalore or wherever in India, it gives them security and the other person understands where they come from. I think it's a cultural barrier more than a language barrier. I think some people from the aspirational middle-class feel like they might be perceived differently – I don't know why that is. I would say that if they weren't as conservative and they gave it a chance, then it would be perfectly ok.

Sahil positions suburban strivers (the ‘aspiring middle-class’) as conservative, reserved and uncomfortable outside the Indian community/diaspora. Sahil identifies this as the result of cultural boundaries, rather than other (perhaps, more acceptable) language barriers. The implication is that suburban strivers do possess English language skills required to interact with foreign friends (in Chapter Four I discussed language and the reproduction of class status), but lack the cultural capital that facilitates comfort in the company of non-Indians. Being ‘more open’ to other cultures and finding comfortable spaces within foreign landscapes is thus a marker of possessing greater quantities of cosmopolitan cultural capital (Weenink, 2008). The implication is that suburban strivers cannot go overseas and acquire cosmopolitan cultural capital, rather, one must possess cosmopolitan cultural capital before they leave India in order to experience international education in the ‘right’ or ‘best’ way.

Echoing earlier anecdotes about the desire to ‘become independent’ via international education experiences, Sahil continued his thoughts about why suburban strivers behave with constraint whilst abroad. Sahil contends that SoBo elites and suburban strivers have divergent incentives to engage with international education, based on whether they are there for a degree or for an ‘experience’:

They have an end goal in mind. I was there for an experience. So while my end goal *was* a degree, I had absolutely no doubt that I was going to get that degree ... I had my eyes set on the fact that I was there for education. But I

really held to the fact that I had this opportunity to make it an *experience*. At that level, I think they were there because it was like, ‘if I don’t have that degree, then what is it going to be like?’ For them, the degree is the end-all and be-all. ... I think it’s a much more serious atmosphere for them. ... I think it’s a difference in approach. I think it just doesn’t occur to them to give it a shot, to put themselves out there.

Sahil’s comment illuminates the unevenness of international education experiences among Indian students. Sahil describes his ability to make international education an ‘experience’, as opposed to suburban striver students whose economic situation is less stable and therefore they are more anxious about ensuring that they obtain a degree with marks that will allow them to find a good job after they graduate. Furthermore, Sahil’s comment speaks to the fact that for SoBo elites, international education is presupposed as part of their lifecourse, whereas for suburban strivers studying overseas is aspirational and is therefore more fraught. However, as the next section discusses, gender can have a significant impact on determining which suburban strivers become mobile in the first place, despite widely held aspirations to pursue international education.

## LIMITED MOBILITIES

India has the most skewed gender ratio of any major international student sending country (Sondhi, 2015). Using available data from Canada, Australia, UK, South Africa and France, in 2010 UNESCO calculated that 27% of India’s international student cohort were women. More recent Australian government statistics reveal that this trend has not waned, with 28.5% of the 2015 Indian student intake comprised of women. This sits in stark contrast to China, for instance, whose student cohort travelling to Australia in 2015 comprised of 52.7% women, which was similar to the 55% reported by UNESCO in 2010. Anecdotal evidence from agents and counsellors as well as university representatives in this study reflect this skewed gender ratio among Indian international students. As one university representative told me, “we have *a lot* more male candidates going as compared to female candidates, no doubt about it.” Agents in the study uniformly estimated that 10% of their clientele were women. Counsellors reported slightly higher numbers, estimating that 20% to 40% of their predominantly SoBo elite clientele are women. These figures suggest that SoBo elite women potentially face fewer barriers to becoming mobile students. However, on the whole, women’s mobilities are more constrained than their male peers.

This is not a surprising finding. As mentioned in Chapter Two, a large body of literature has demonstrated the myriad ways in which women's mobilities are limited compared to men, particularly women from the Global South. This literature examines skilled migrant women (Purkayastha, 2005; Man, 2004; Yeoh & Khoo, 2002), undocumented workers (Hancock, 2007; Campbell, 2008; Hogeland & Rosen, 1990), emotions and oftentimes strained family connections (Parreñas, 2001; Mahdavi, 2016; McKay, 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994, 2007), among many other topics. However, this body of literature often focuses on non-elite women and on transnational motherhood/relationships, so the present study adds a valuable perspective in relation to class as well as lifecourses. Furthermore, despite this expansive literature on women's mobilities, student mobilities are rarely discussed from a gendered perspective (Sondhi, 2015), even though it stands to reason that female international students are likely to encounter discrimination and hardships that are not dissimilar to other mobile women (for exceptions, as discussed in Chapter Two, see Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Martin, 2018; King & Sondhi, 2016; Holloway et al., 2012; Karupiah, 2018; Sondhi & King, 2017).

In this study, despite suburban strivers' desire for upward socio-economic mobility described in sections above, this group considered gender a reason to limit the physical mobility of young women. That is, suburban striver families (much more so than SoBo elite families) may not permit young women to study overseas in order to ensure their safety, despite the potential career and economic advantages of such a move (see also Forsberg, 2017).

Unlike the SoBo elites, suburban strivers often raised the issue of women's 'unprotectedness' when they study overseas. Ashish, 18, a prospective suburban striver student, explained the different attitudes that he had observed towards young men and women:

Families won't be comfortable sending them there, because who is going to be there to take care? If any person troubles them, then there's no one to protect them. That's what men feel. No, this is what families feel – even the women feel that way. Boys, it's not that way. Like, we get the liberties that girls don't get. ... Because they're not worried about protecting us like they are with women. ... So I think, for girls, it's more difficult to convince their parents that they want to go abroad. Because parents are, you know, even if it's today in modern India parents still have that conservative mindset because they feel that who is going to be there for her? Who is going to protect her,

take care of her? How will she live there alone? So, boys, it's not that much about protection – it's how will they cook for themselves? [laughs]

These concerns around safety and gender were echoed by several young suburban striver women themselves. Shriya, 18, also a prospective student from a suburban striver family, described her and her family's reservations about her desire to study overseas:

Going to a place where I know no one and nothing, I could probably die there and no one would notice! ... My parents are definitely scared. My mum not so much, but my dad is definitely scared because I'm a girl.

Doreen Massey (1994) suggests that women's safety is central to their ability to be mobile. She argues that men are a fundamental reason for women's immobilities, which cuts across class lines: "the degree to which we can move between countries, or walk about the streets at night, or venture out of hotels in foreign cities, is not just influenced by 'capital'. Survey after survey has shown how women's mobility ... is restricted - in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply 'out of place' – not by 'capital', but by men" (147-8). Sara Forsberg (2017) similarly reports that in urban Kerala, parents limited the mobilities of girls because of a perceived need to protect them from crime or 'public shaming'.

The threat of violence (physical, symbolic or otherwise) is a persistent concern for women anywhere in the world (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). In India, however, violence against women has particularly come to prominence in recent years following the high-profile gang rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi in 2012 (Lodhia, 2015; Shandilya, 2015). An element of public opinion evident in the ensuing debate is that women are responsible for their own safety and should dress and move conservatively in order to ensure that they do not 'attract' men (Roychowdhury, 2013). Priyanka, a mother of two boys and an agent from a suburban striver background, echoed this by suggesting that when women are studying overseas they should ensure their safety by presenting as 'simple':

If you go to any place in the world, the protection of you as a girl lies with you and your behaviours. Not with anybody else. It's with you. How you dress-up, how you move. See, the more simple you are, nobody is going to look at you. If you are out with the moon then everybody is going to come.

According to Priyanka, women's safety is ensured by their modesty. For transnationally mobile women from middle-class backgrounds, it would appear that elder generations expect them to maintain Indian notions of decency and respectability (Gilbertson, 2014b) as they move through the world. These concerns are not dissimilar to observations about the importance to Indian notions of respectable middle-class femininity of domesticity, boundaries and limited engagement with the outside world (Fernandes, 2006; Chakrabarty, 1991; Still, 2011). These notions have their roots in the colonial period when Hindu ideals of the good wife merged with Victorian ideals of femininity (Chatterjee, 1989; Gilbertson, 2014b). As discussed in Chapter Two, a family's and community's honour are tied to the respectability of women, who therefore have to either limit their mobility or be mobile in ways that maintain boundaries of respectability (Radhakrishnan, 2008, 2009, 2011; Flemming, 2016; Gilbertson, 2014b; Twamley & Sidharth, 2018).

The vulnerability of women who become 'too exposed' was also a concern voiced by some suburban striver participants. Fazlur, an agent from the outer suburbs of Mumbai, implied that recent social changes in India had compromised the virtue of women: "India has become over-Westernised. ... They have adopted Western culture. Dressing, girls are out late and working – it never used to be a case before." The tone of Fazlur's voice suggested that becoming 'over-Westernised' was a negative thing, and he later suggested that women should instead be 'good', 'simple' and 'family-focused', which echoes literature on what attributes the ideal middle-class Indian woman should embody (Bulbeck, 2010; Gilbertson, 2014b; Chatterjee, 1989; Radhakrishnan, 2011; Flemming, 2016). As Walton-Roberts (2015a) observes, women's educational engagement and socio-spatial mobility can be read as an expression of modernity, but this progress is replete with contradictions that demand they and their families carefully balance risk and reward.

Although older people in the study (parents and industry professionals) perceived the mobility of young women through a lens of potential risks, most young women from suburban striver backgrounds believed that international education would allow them to demonstrate that they are not as vulnerable as some believe them to be. For instance:

If I were a guy, I think [my parents] would be more sure that I could take care of myself, as opposed to me being a girl. But the point is that I can't show them that I can take care of myself until I actually *get* to take care of myself!

– *Neha, female, 18, suburban striver prospective student*

My grandmother told me that I shouldn't be studying psychology because I'm a girl, and girls shouldn't be studying in that field – they shouldn't become doctors. She's very backward. ... She [also] cries about my safety, and which I think is so ridiculous. Like, what does she think will happen?! It makes me want to go there just to prove her wrong!

– *Aalika, female, 23, suburban striver prospective student*

For these women, the prospect of (temporarily) leaving the family unit to study overseas provides them with an opportunity to negotiate their independence and potentially renegotiate gender hierarchies (see also Raghuram, 2004; Martin, 2018). However, mobility must ultimately be supported by the family given that Indian families are almost always the financiers of a child's international education (Thomas, 2017).

Walton-Roberts (2015a) similarly observes the importance of family in the decision-making process of Indian international students, finding that parents are central to this process and often encourage their daughters to study overseas in order to commence a familial migration strategy (similar to strategies of East Asian families described by Waters, 2005, 2006a). As a result, Walton-Roberts finds that young women are “not engaging in overseas migration as an act of independence or overstated autonomy” and are actually quite constrained in their mobility (2015a: 79). In this study, however, the opposite appears to be occurring wherein young women seek independence from their families via international education. The differences between this study and Walton-Roberts' (2015a) findings likely relate to class status and regional differences in India. Walton-Roberts' participants hail from Kerala and Punjab, which are renowned for their high rates of skilled worker out-migration (Tumbe, 2012; Forsberg, 2017; Voigt-Graf, 2005). Her participants were also studying nursing, which was not an occupation considered by any participants in my study, who were primarily contemplating degrees in business, IT, accounting and engineering.

The data presented in this section thereby highlights that, while young Indian women are undoubtedly less mobile than Indian men (Sondhi, 2015), there also exist

gendered inequalities and unevenness within international student mobilities. Participants in this study are almost certainly of a higher class status than Walton-Roberts' (2015a) respondents and are therefore likely to experience mobility differently at all phases. In the pre-departure phase, the higher levels of capital that families in this study possess translates to the desire to accumulate cosmopolitan cultural capital (whether pertaining to career advancement or self-actualisation) above the economic capital that Walton-Roberts' (2015a) participants are pursuing. Furthermore, higher class status generally equates to greater access to economic capital, which not only makes affording international education theoretically easier, it also potentially reduces anxiety around factors such as physically caring for ageing parents because paid help can be purchased (this is discussed further in Chapter Seven).

The notion that class may shape people's perceptions of women's mobility was shared by my participants. As Harshil, 19, a suburban striver prospective student explained:

Families like to keep their girls close to home. It depends on caste and religion, that's one thing. ... The other thing is your class. Like, if you're in the lower-middle-class and you're a girl, then your family might want to keep you closer to home. Because, like, they don't have a history of travel. If you're upper-class or upper-middle-class then I think your family is more likely to send you if you're a girl, because they feel more comfortable with that.

Harshil aptly identifies a history of travel as a central factor in determining how comfortable families are with the mobility of their daughters. This may explain why concerns about safety were only expressed by my striver participants and why a greater proportion of students from the SoBo elite are women. Further, as discussed earlier in this chapter, SoBo elites tend to travel abroad several times per year. For them, international mobility is commonplace and therefore potentially perceived as less threatening to women's respectability. It is also possible that SoBo elites possess more economic capital and are therefore better positioned to invest in the education of their daughters as well as their sons.

It must be stressed, however, that the women in this study are an exception, given the statistics at the top of the section that revealed that 27% of India's outgoing international students are women. This means that their experiences are not necessarily

typical of Indian women, many of whom may not be in a position to even broach the topic of international education with their families. The ‘familial history of travel’ arguments put forward by participants in this chapter was used to explain acceptance of women’s mobilities, but this is also driven by an assumption that ‘high class’ equates to modernity and progressive mindsets, which this section has suggested may not always be the case. If immobility is the norm for Indian women, this indicates that ‘exposure’ is gendered – it is more important and less problematic for men to accumulate cosmopolitan cultural capital, as they are potentially the bearers of capital for the family unit.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that different meanings are attached to the notion of ‘gaining exposure’, which correspond to localised micro-categories of class. For suburban strivers, exposure as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital was paramount to their strategies for upward socio-economic mobility. Suburban strivers imagined that attending foreign universities and gaining experience in foreign workplaces would allow them to accumulate ‘practical’ exposure, which I have argued is a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital that participants expected to convert into economic capital by securing better jobs in India. Suburban strivers’ discourse around ‘exposure’ revealed the notion that young people must ‘become global’ in order to be successful at work in India (see also Upadhyia, 2016a; Gilbertson, 2014c). Exposure is something that is acquired outside India, specifically in the West. In turn, this reinforces the higher position of the upper-middle class and elite in the Indian context, who can afford international travel, as opposed to the middle class who are less likely to travel for leisure or education primarily because their economic capital is less likely to allow for it. Suburban strivers expected their foreign degrees would be read – particularly by employers – as more meritorious than a locally acquired degree, which disguises educational advantage procured by superior economic and cultural capital. As Khan (2011: 8) rightly notes, “there is nothing innate about merit.”

Despite the aspirations of parents and the desire among suburban strivers for upward socio-economic mobility, suburban striver women in particular faced barriers to becoming mobile on the basis of their gender. Personal safety was cited by many participants as a concern for young women when they study overseas, although young women themselves did not always share this anxiety. These responses reflected other



literature on class in India, which finds that middle-class professional women often find themselves balancing Indian morality and a new global Indian identity (Radhakrishnan, 2011; Flemming, 2016; see also Walton-Roberts, 2015a). In this study, localised micro-categories of class appear to work in tandem with gender to govern the extent to which young women are able or allowed to be mobile, with suburban strivers more likely to experience limitations than the SoBo elite. Participants suggested that these limitations are perhaps a result of lower levels of accumulated capital, especially cosmopolitan cultural capital, because suburban striver parents are less ‘exposed’ than SoBo elite parents.

This not only suggests that the accumulation of cosmopolitan cultural capital via international education is gendered, but also highlights the importance of framing international education as an event that occurs within the lifecourse. As the first section of this chapter demonstrated, SoBo elites have accumulated cosmopolitan cultural capital prior to engaging with international education because their schools and families ensure that they become ‘exposed’ from a young age and are prepared to study overseas. SoBo elite participants had all attended elite high schools that deliver international curricula, which participants thought would better prepare them/their children to transition into foreign universities in Anglophone countries. This, along with frequent international holidays to exotic destinations, equipped SoBo elites with knowledge that would allow them to reproduce their privilege via international education. This contrasts to the school experiences of suburban strivers, many of whom did not attend schools that delivered an international curriculum. Those suburban strivers who did attend ‘international’ schools were often critical of their school and described shortfalls that resulted in them feeling disadvantaged when they sought international education. For suburban strivers, international education is not imagined as an initiation into adult life in the same that studying overseas is presupposed as part of the lifecourse of SoBo elites, which can mean that experiences around international education are uneven long before students make the decision about what and where to study.

For SoBo elites, international education was imagined as a rite of passage through which they build character and capabilities, as well as cognitive skills that are imagined as distinctly Western and cosmopolitan. Gaining exposure was a project of self-

actualisation that SoBo elites deemed ‘necessary’ for their personal development. For SoBo elites, exposure as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital took on different meaning compared to the suburban strivers wherein the symbolic value of international education was paramount, signifying prestige and superior levels of taste, comportment and ideologies. SoBo elites had no need to frame exposure in terms of career advancement or economic gain because those factors are typically secure prior to an elite student’s departure. However, gaining exposure also involved a ‘necessary’ temporary divestment of material benefits that being elite in India affords. SoBo elite participants imagined that experiencing ‘hardship’ would deliver independence and personal growth, but, ironically students’ families *pay* for them to experience said hardship. In this case, it is desirable for young Indian people to experience downward class mobility, temporarily, in lieu of acquiring other attributes. Rutten and Verstappen (2014) similarly find that, for their Indian participants in London, learning to fend for oneself was a fraught process. They conclude that “the migration experience was one of upward mobility, though paradoxically, downward social mobility as well” (1226).

SoBo elites criticised suburban strivers for taking their education too seriously and therefore not tapping into ‘the experience’. Different ideas about what gaining exposure means highlights the negotiation of boundaries between localised micro-categories of class, in which the SoBo elite prioritise personal growth that promises self-actualisation, while assuming that suburban strivers ‘only’ pursue ‘the degree’. SoBo elites, however, overlook the fact that suburban strivers perceive a different kind of a growth or transformation as a result of international education, which they value more than self-actualisation. Crucially, each group is asserting that their approach to international education is superior. This resonates with the literature on class in India, which finds that the less wealthy mock the pretentiousness of the middle class, and the middle class critique the excesses and depravity of the elite (Gilbertson, 2017a; Dickey, 2016; Mazzarella, 2005; Jeffrey, 2010; Jayadeva, 2018; Vijayakumar, 2013; van Wessel, 2004). This chapter makes an important contribution to this literature by revealing how the elite view the upper-middle class and what differences they use to negotiate class boundaries.

Last, unlike much of the literature on student mobilities focused on young people from the Global South (Robertson, 2013; Waters, 2005, 2006a; Baas, 2010; Robertson et al., 2011), *prospective* students in this study rarely imagined international education as a pathway to permanent migration. On the contrary, suburban strivers – who one might expect to be most likely to pursue further migration – imagined that gaining international exposure by working overseas would provide an opportunity to become upwardly mobile when they returned to India. However, as Chapter Eight will demonstrate, *actual* returned students from suburban striver backgrounds suggest that returning to India becomes less desirable once one spends time overseas. This discrepancy highlights the importance of studying international students at multiple stages of the lifecourse (Ranghram, 2013), which can reveal how aspirations can shift over time as young people accumulate experiences via global mobility.



## PART TWO

# POST-STUDY LIVES

Over frothy cappuccinos at Starbucks in Fort, South Mumbai's financial district, I chatted to Shalin about his decision to return to India. Shalin grew up in the suburbs, but his father is a lawyer so Shalin explained that his family had always enjoyed a stable financial situation. Shalin attended private schools that administered the CBSE curriculum until he shifted to an IB school in the 11<sup>th</sup> standard. He performed well at school, so his family decided that he could study overseas. With the help of an education agent and a loan, Shalin went to Australia to complete a Bachelor of Aviation. After graduating he found sporadic work as a flight instructor, which he did for two years before returning to Mumbai because he was unable to secure permanent residency in Australia. Shalin insisted that his 'decision' to return to Mumbai was a not a bad one; he was closer to family, able to contribute to India's growing economy, and he had recently nabbed a desirable job as a commercial pilot. However, he conceded that the transition had not been easy. The job market in India was much more difficult than he had anticipated, and his family did not have the social connections that could have facilitated opportunities that Shalin thought he ought to have been entitled to given his foreign qualification. His years living in Australia had also encouraged him to become 'independent', which caused conflict when he returned to the family home in Mumbai. He was no longer used to living under his parents' surveillance and pushed back against this, which had upset his mother in particular. Now that he had entered his late 20s and secured a 'proper' job, the next step for Shalin and his family was to search for a suitable bride so that Shalin could 'settle in life'.

Several weeks later, in the same Starbucks and again over cappuccinos, I met 24-year-old Nitu, who had recently returned to Mumbai after completing a Master of International Relations in the UK. Nitu grew up in a South Mumbai family who have a large textiles business. Though it was an option, Nitu had no desire to join the family business. She would 'rather just chill'. Nitu giggled as she recounted all of the fun she had whilst studying in the UK. She partied several nights a week, dated boys, went shopping, travelled the UK and Europe and made lots of new friends in the process.

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However, now that she was back in Mumbai, she was busy being introduced to potential grooms by her family. Nitu explained that when she went to the UK, she and her family had an understanding that she could have fun, but when she returned she would be expected to marry into an equally wealthy South Mumbai business family, ideally from the Gujarati community. Nitu's foreign degree, along with her well-known family, her age and conventional good looks made her a desirable bride. Nitu leveraged this, insisting that her suitors must have also studied abroad because she believed that the international education experience produced Indian men that would be more liberal husbands.

A huge amount of capital is invested in the international education of students like Shalin and Nitu, yet relatively little scholarly literature focuses on the post-study outcomes – actual or imagined – of international education for these students (Collins et al., 2017). In Part Two, I focus on the narratives of returned students and their experiences of returning to India. By attending to class granularity within student bodies, the data presented in Part Two reveal that experiences of international education are often specific to a student's localised class status, which furthers arguments made in Part One.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **‘I WAS NEVER WILLING TO SETTLE THERE’: CLASSED RETURN TRAJECTORIES**

“For me, living in New York was only ever going to be temporary. I was never willing to settle there, eventually I wanted to come back.”

– Piyush, 25, SoBo elite returned student

Returning to live in India was imagined as part of the international education journeys of many participants. Piyush’s comment, above, exemplifies that students typically *imagined* returning to India. Chapter Six discussed how suburban strivers imagined gaining cosmopolitan cultural capital in order to advance their careers in India, while SoBo elites perceived that international education would enhance or maintain their privilege in India. However, this chapter demonstrates that returning to India can have varied impacts according to an individual’s localised micro-category of class. This chapter first reveals that, once they are abroad, suburban strivers seem to change their attitudes towards return and many try to remain overseas in the longer term. For this group, returning to India is often a negative experience – which is at odds with the imaginaries of prospective suburban striver students who anticipated upward socio-economic mobility specifically upon their return to India. On the other hand, SoBo elites experienced return as an expectation that correlates to their elite status in India. For this group, returning to India marks their privilege and their entrance to adulthood – returning to India is presupposed in the same way that studying overseas is presupposed for the SoBo elite. As the third section of this chapter demonstrates, however, there are also common reasons pertaining to duty (to family and to nation) that both suburban strivers and SoBo elites use to justify and legitimate their return to India, though these rationales are also coloured by localised micro-categories of class.

By attending to experiences of returning home, this chapter addresses a key gap in international student mobilities literature. In Chapter Two I discussed the call for scholars to attend to the experiences of students after they have graduated (Collins et al.,

2017), in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how international education actually impacts the lives and lifecourses of – in this case – students who return home. For instance, in his study of young mobile men from Kerala, Sancho (2017: 517-8) observes that “my informants’ intentions are almost never to stay in Australia indefinitely. Instead, they envisage migration as a temporary strategy geared towards accruing economic and cultural capital necessary for the fulfilment of class-based personal ambitions and wider social responsibilities at home.” Batnitzky et al. (2007: 66) similarly find that the young Indian men in their study “did not migrate solely for economic reasons, but rather ... to augment their gender and class identities in India.” However, what happens when young people return home to India? Are their aspirations fulfilled? This chapter seeks to address these questions, arguing that the expectations around cosmopolitan cultural capital imagined by prospective students often does not live up to imaginaries in the case of suburban striver students, whereas SoBo elites have a much smoother experience of return.

## **EXPERIENCING RETURN AS A SUBURBAN STRIVER**

For students from suburban striver families, returning to India was often not as triumphant as they might have imagined. As Chapter Six demonstrated, prospective suburban striver students imagined returning to India after acquiring the requisite amount of international exposure. However, this section demonstrates that returning to India is often fraught for suburban strivers, accompanied with a sense of failure, of missing out on a ‘return on investment’ and of possible downward socio-economic mobility.

When I spoke to returned students from suburban striver backgrounds, they revealed that once they went overseas they generally wanted to remain there in the long-term. I also had great difficulty finding returned students from suburban striver backgrounds to participate in this study, which further suggests that this group is less likely to return than the more affluent SoBo elite. Rahul, an education agent in Mumbai’s outer suburbs, explained the discrepancy between prospective students’ desire to return and the often-involuntary return of graduated suburban striver students:

Mumbai students don’t mind actually, coming back to India. ... It’s not the worst case. But I would think that 80% will not return back. They will talk



about it – ‘Yes sir I will come back in two years’ – but maybe the lifestyle over there is different to India and maybe they will settle down there itself.

In Rahul’s instance, the vast majority of his clients had never travelled internationally prior to seeking international education. This disconnect between imagined and lived experiences relates to Margaret Walton-Roberts’ (2004) research that finds evidence of a ‘myth of return’ among Indian migrants in Anglophone countries, wherein respondents wished to return to India but as time progressed they often remained in the host country – very few ultimately return ‘home’ permanently (see also Rangaswamy, 2000).

If students from suburban striver families do return, it often marked a downward turn in their socio-economic mobility. Tanmaya, an education counsellor and student from a suburban striver family who had recently graduated in the UK and returned to India after the UK changed their immigration policies (see Chapter Five), explained that her return was met with disdain within her community:

There’s a mentality that, ‘If you go there, then you shouldn’t come back’. Or, ‘Why are you downgrading yourself?’ So there were quite a few people who said to me, ‘Why did you come back? Shouldn’t you have just stayed and settled in over there?’

Tanmaya found it frustrating to explain that her return had been involuntary – she felt ‘judged’ by her neighbours and peers because she had not managed to migrate out of India. Tanmaya’s return to India represented a downgrade in status in the eyes of her community because she had not remained overseas. In Chapter Six, prospective students from suburban striver families did not imagine that their return would be called into question because they anticipated that their merit and cosmopolitan cultural capital would be most recognised in India.

There was also a discrepancy in attitudes towards professional work in India between prospective students and returned students. Prospective students imagined that they would get the ‘best package’ in India but returned suburban strivers who entered professional careers lamented the fact that they were working in India, describing their work lives as lacking. Richa, 28, a lawyer from a suburban striver family who returned because her UK visa had expired and was unable to secure visa sponsorship, explained that working as a professional in India was undesirable:

The majority who come back are from business families. ... Nobody comes back because they *want* to work here. Most people start businesses or they have some idea that within a year or two they'll start something. No one actually wants to be a professional here. ... My work environment here is so shit compared to when I was working in London. ... Professions are just so far behind in India, they aren't even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Returning to India can be experienced as a 'failure' for suburban strivers. Richa explained that she regretted having to come back to India and suggested that in the future she would look for ways to leave – including joking that she would find a husband overseas just so that she could work in a better professional environment. Prior to departure, students imagine that 'exposure' will allow them to obtain a high-status 'package' in India, but in the process of accumulating cosmopolitan cultural capital by working overseas suburban strivers also become aware of different professional environments, which tends to result in dissatisfaction upon return and (re-)entry into the Indian labour market. This resulted in many returned suburban strivers contemplating ways to leave India again, ideally permanently, in order to circumvent long-term professional (and perhaps personal) discontent.

Some suburban strivers had been able to secure 'a decent job' when they returned to Mumbai, however this was often outside the area in which they were degree-qualified. These students tended to explain their return in terms of 'not wanting to waste time' by remaining in a host country with a difficult job market. Their return was, however, often lamented by parents who had invested in their education and presumably had specific expectations about their careers. Rajni, an education counsellor in her late-20s and returned student from a suburban striver family, explained why she had returned to Mumbai earlier than planned:

I graduated when the recession hit the US and they introduced restrictions on work permits. No company was readily sponsoring work permits for international students, so I faced those issues. So I was like, why should I waste my time there? Might as well come back and find something here. ... So I came back to India and I got a decent job. But it's outside my field. ... So my parents were like, 'Why did we send you over there to become an engineer if you were just going to come back here and take up any odd-job?'

Rajni's parents questioned the value of her foreign degree when she returned to India. Rajni went on to explain that she was worried about repaying her loan because she had been unable to remain in the US. She had taken a job as an education counsellor because,

for the time being, it paid better than anything she was able to secure as an engineer. Suburban strivers who returned to India not only experienced downward socio-economic mobility in the eyes of their community but were also unable to pursue the ‘return on investment’ that international education promises prospective students. This suggests that the cosmopolitan cultural capital that prospective students imagine will propel their careers in India does not necessarily translate to reality.

When suburban strivers return to India, it can reveal the risks they take when they decide to pursue an international education. In a similar vein, Susan Thomas (2017) observes that for Indian ‘middle-class’ students enrolled at a public university in New York City, working after they graduate was hugely important in order to repay loans. Thomas argues that “students and their kinship networks are bearing significant risks to invest in their human capital, a practice encouraged in a post-liberalisation India that promises economic prosperity for those who pursue their own futures with the appropriate risks and calculations” (2017: 7). Suburban strivers *invest* in international education and its anticipated outcomes, and because there is an investment, there is risk (Thomas, 2017). For instance, Mansi, 28, a returned student from a suburban striver family, explained that she returned to India when she was unable to find a job in the USA, which meant that she was unable to ‘recover her investment’:

When I left I didn’t intend to come back. I was looking for jobs there. ... It’s really hard though. The way it works is [the employer has] to sponsor your visa, and by the time employers have gone through Harvard, Yale, Stanford – by the time they reach a 40-50 ranked university, they’re only looking at the top students. I wasn’t a top student, so the opportunities available were not anything exciting. ... I wanted to stay and work there so I could get the return on investment. If you spend US\$40-50,000 per year, and you come back and start earning in rupees you’re not going to recover your investment.

Mansi’s comment suggests that the promise of career success resulting from international education is not always realised by graduates. She was also finding it difficult to work in India – she was not enjoying her job with a well-known consulting firm, nor was she earning enough to ‘recover’ her (parents’) educational investment. While Mansi frames the ‘return on investment’ primarily in economic terms (i.e. repaying debt and upward economic mobility), the earlier responses in this section also suggest that return on investment relates to status. In order for suburban strivers to justify international education, they expect to be economically as well as socially rewarded upon returning to

India. However, this section demonstrates that these rewards are not often met according to the imaginaries of students at the pre-departure phase when the decision is made to invest in international education.

The expiration, denial or unavailability of visas that entitle students to work after they graduate is a significant challenge encountered by suburban strivers, who rely on working overseas in order to repay their loan debts. Dhruv, an education counsellor and returned student in his early-30s, explained that seeking international education can be a ‘big risk’ because immigration policies can change suddenly and planned migration trajectories can be thwarted by circumstances beyond the control of the individual. For suburban striver families, this can pose a financial risk:

It’s a big risk to study abroad, because you never know. Like, recently in the UK they imposed the law that international students cannot work there. So the students who were there at that time, they would have been in a fix because they spent so much money and they have absolutely no permission from the government to work over there. So they had to leave everything and come back, and all that money is gone.

Dhruv explained that many of his clients were forced to return to India when the UK changed the conditions of their Post-Study Work visa to exclude non-European Union students (see Chapter Five). The upheaval experienced by students who have to return home suddenly without being able to work overseas highlights the vulnerability of suburban strivers, who not only miss out on gaining international exposure to further their careers but may also find repaying their education loans more difficult than they had anticipated, which can put additional financial pressure on families.

Focusing on ‘lifetime mobility aspirations’, Findlay et al. (2017: 196) similarly found that “the possibility of return was not only represented by many students as a sign of failure and disappointment to their families, but the need to secure a job following graduation was also understood as a necessity to pay off tuition fees and loans given by the family to support study abroad.” These risks are, however, only applicable to suburban strivers. Despite assertions by prospective students and agents/counsellors in Chapter Five that getting a job overseas is ‘easy’ and repaying education loans is therefore straightforward, these data demonstrate that these imaginaries of a ‘risk free’ international education are largely misplaced. For suburban strivers, it appears that the cosmopolitan

cultural capital they seek to accumulate via international education, described in Chapter Six, may not have the assured benefits that they anticipate.

For some suburban strivers who returned to India, possessing a foreign degree also did not convert to the job market advantages that they had expected. This means that returning to India not only represents lost opportunity to work overseas to repay loan debt, but that upward socio-economic mobility imagined by prospective students in relation to getting a ‘better package’ upon return (Chapter Six) could also be a pipedream. Tanmaya (introduced above) explained that she faced barriers upon returning to India, despite having a foreign degree. She found that employers wanted to employ young people with ‘local’ knowledge, which she did not possess because she had lived overseas for several years:

Having a foreign degree doesn’t necessarily place you ahead. Even I faced that problem when I came back to India. They expected me to know current affairs and business in India, and I did not have that much time to come back and start figuring out what-is-what.

Tanmaya explained that her lack of knowledge meant that she missed out on several jobs that she applied for in her field. Her foreign degree had not positioned her as the most meritorious candidate, as prospective students anticipate (see Chapter Six). Tanmaya said that she was working as an education counsellor because that was the best job she was able to get with her British MBA, and she had recently enrolled in a Bachelor of Law in India so that she could pursue a ‘fulfilling’ career. In order to further her career, she found that she needed a local qualification and that her international education was not as valuable as she had anticipated. While prospective students and the international education industry value the ‘global’ over the ‘local’, the experiences of suburban striver students in this section calls the value of the ‘global’ into question. It suggests that, for suburban strivers, the ‘global’ is valuable primarily or perhaps only when they remain overseas in the long-term. Whereas for the SoBo elite, the ‘global’ becomes valuable when they return to India with ‘the stamp’ of having spent time abroad.

## **EXPERIENCING RETURN AS A SOBO ELITE**

Students from SoBo elite backgrounds experienced returning to India very differently to suburban strivers. This group was expected to return to India after

completing their international education in order to join the family business (or to get married, as Chapter Eight will discuss). This group's mobility trajectories are largely pre-determined by familial expectations. While this is sometimes read by others as restrictive, SoBo elites contended that they happily returned to Mumbai because their lifestyles are more 'comfortable' at home.

The existence of a family business typically meant that SoBo students' mobility trajectories were decided long before they engage with international education. Young men were more likely to report this expectation (however, the sample is too small to draw any conclusions beyond noting a trend<sup>33</sup>). Sahil, 22, a returned student from a SoBo elite family that owns a diamond business, described that he 'always knew' that he would join the family business because he had been 'coached' from a young age:

I always knew that my family wanted me to return one day and I knew that they would prefer that I didn't stay away too long. ... We have a business here so I grew up knowing that one day I would join the business. I spent a lot of my teenage years learning about different businesses ... so I guess you could say that my family has been coaching me to join them for a long time!

Basing his comments on what he has witnessed among his high school friends, Anirudh, 25, a returned student from a SoBo elite family whose parents are well-paid professionals, explained that young people from business families 'know' that they will return to India to take up their pre-determined role within the company:

If you're going to end up in the family business, if that's the expectation, then you probably know by the time you're fifteen. Then you have no geographic freedom. ... The reality is that your family can tell you, 'Five years from now, we want you to be here'. And there's nothing you can say!

The expectation that SoBo elite students will join the family business determines their return trajectories. Furthermore, both these responses suggest that return trajectories are time-specific, are potentially dictated by the family and that absences should not be 'too long'. Anirudh suggests that this also limits the 'geographic freedom' of SoBo elite students from business families. However, that mobility trajectories of the SoBo elite are time-specific also denotes their elite status. SoBo elites can, hypothetically, return to India

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<sup>33</sup> Unlike the data on marriage presented in Chapter Eight, participants did not report this form of return in gendered terms. Instead, I note that men in the sample were more likely to describe being expected to return, but participants did not explicitly observe this as specific to men.

at any time and still be rewarded by having spent time overseas because their ‘return on investment’ is not contingent on working overseas.

Most SoBo students reported that they wanted to join the family business so they willingly returned according to their family’s desires. For instance, Piyush, 25, a returned student from a SoBo elite business family:

My family wanted me to come back, yeah. But I also wanted to come back to Mumbai! I always wanted to join the business, and I like being here. It’s a good life over here.

Other respondents similarly reported wanting to return to India because they have opportunities waiting for them at home. Umang, 22, a SoBo elite returned student from a well-known business family, explained that he returned to India for several reasons, namely that he leads a comfortable lifestyle in India and that he has ‘more leverage’ there:

There’s a certain amount of comfort [in India] and that definitely plays a big factor. There’s also a foundation, as in there is something that I can build on, I don’t have to start from scratch. If I wanted, I can take over my dad’s business one day, or I can lean on my father for the people he knows, his understanding of the system. So there’s a lot more I can leverage here.

Both of these responses suggest that, for SoBo elites, returning to India is part of their expected trajectory as they transition into ‘adulthood’. In contrast to suburban strivers, for SoBo elites returning home did not represent a ‘failure’. Instead, return was a marker of their elite status because international education is a hiatus from life in India rather than a pursuit of upward mobility – the cosmopolitan cultural capital that SoBo elites accumulate therefore holds symbolic value (unlike the economic returns that suburban strivers desire). Furthermore, the access to social and economic capital that this group has in India is unparalleled, so returning home is an attractive prospect not only because of the business opportunities awaiting them in India but also because their lifestyles in Mumbai are ‘comfortable’ and they have extensive family networks that they can ‘leverage’ to advance careers. For this group, international education is primarily a marker of status.

Several studies on student mobilities relating to India (Sancho, 2015; Baas, 2016; Rizvi, 2014), and elsewhere in the Global South (Tran, 2016), have observed a similar return trajectory of international students belonging to business families. Fazal Rizvi

(2014) notes a trend among students at an old elite school in central India, wherein parents who own small businesses wanted their children to obtain an international education with the view that it would help internationalise the family business. Rizvi observes that many of these students return to India, regarding themselves as “well prepared for global engagement, while insisting that they remain deeply committed to Indian values and cultural practices. Their social imaginary is at once global and local, modern and traditional” (2014: 306). Similarly, SoBo elites journey overseas in order to acquire a ‘global’ mindset that I have interpreted as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital (Chapters Two and Six), which they then anticipate converting to symbolic capital in the form of prestige associated with having spent time overseas. For this group, international education is an ‘experience’ that they often gladly return from in order to resume the ‘comfortable’ lives they temporarily left behind in India.

Many SoBo elite returned students explained that their desire to return to was informed by the lifestyles they grew up with, in which they have paid staff to assist with household tasks. Vidya, 25, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, described the ‘difficulties’ she faced when looking after herself whilst overseas, and that she was glad to return to a more convenient lifestyle in India:

I need my breakfast on the table when I get up, I need my lunch, I need my dinner, I need my clothes ironed and put into my cupboard, I need a chauffeur to drive me around. I *need* it. Because, I mean, I *can* manage it when I have to but not for a complete lifetime. It’s because of how I have grown up. ... I can’t do that *every day*. I can’t. Well, I *can*, but I wouldn’t want to. It’s very difficult, so I prefer this. ... Like, dude, you get up and you don’t even have your breakfast on the table. You have to cook it! It was fairly difficult for me to do all of that. I was tired!

Vidya explained that she had always intended to return to India after graduating because she did not think she could manage working a full-time job and looking after herself – as she says, she ‘needs’ certain luxuries. This reflects the findings in Chapter Six, wherein undergoing *temporary* and very relative downward mobility whilst living overseas is prized as an ‘experience’ by SoBo elites. Vidya’s comment reinforces the notion that, for the SoBo elite, this ‘hardship’ is part of a normative trajectory in which one gains international exposure to become ‘independent’ and undergo ‘personal growth’, which symbolises their transition to adulthood by having acquired requisite symbolic capital that marks their privilege in India.



Nimit, 25, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, explained that the timing of his return to India was contingent on the expiration of his visa and because he did not wish to take up ‘any old job just to stay’ – which sets him apart from most suburban strivers, for whom obtaining work overseas is crucial. Nimit always intended to return to India because his life is ‘easier’ at home by virtue of his ability to pay someone to perform household duties, which allows him to work longer hours:

If I'm in India, I have someone to drive me around if I don't want to drive. I have someone who comes and cooks, someone who cleans, I have a person who just answers the phone. ... That is the kind of life that you don't get if you are away. ... I would much rather come back to India, where someone will take care of all these unnecessary things and I can focus on the very important things which enable my life to be good and pay someone else to take care of the administrative things.

Much like Vidya, Nimit stated that he enjoyed his ‘growing experience’ whilst living in London but was glad to return to Mumbai and his ‘old’ life that affords certain luxuries. SoBo elites positioned their return to India as a return to comfort. For many young men, like Nimit, this also carried gendered implications. Nimit frames household duties, which women tend to perform (Donner, 2008; Dickey, 2000) as ‘unnecessary’ barriers to him being able to ‘focus on the very important things’ like paid work, which also allows him to perpetuate his privilege. These ideas around domestic help are also linked to gender and class status (Qayum & Ray, 2003). For elite women in particular, access to paid domestic labour can potentially reconfigure gendered roles or expectations in relation to professional work and household work (Donner, 2008; Radhakrishnan, 2011). However, this is a privilege that is enabled by stark class inequalities in India where this domestic labour is undertaken by poorly paid lower-class women and men (Raghuram, 2001; Dickey, 2000). Paid domestic help allows relatively elite women to engage in paid work outside the home – if they choose, or if their families allow (see Chapter Eight for discussion of the latter) – which further reproduces their privilege by releasing them from the ‘double burden’ experienced by less affluent women.

SoBo elite participants also reported that access to networks that are developed as a result of their inherited class status are a key reason to return to India. Lekha, an education counsellor and returned student, who also comes from a SoBo elite family,

explained that the SoBo elite have better lives in India in terms of lifestyle as well as networks and therefore wish to return:

The upper class has the luxury of return. Everything here is set-up for them, they are sorted. They have their maids, drivers, dog walkers, cooks, cleaners, you name it. So they can devote all of their energy to their business. They are also very well connected socially in India through the schools they went to, where they grew up, their family, *et cetera*. Knowing the right people matters a lot in India, as it does in most other places too, but especially in India. Most of the upper class is not as well-networked overseas as they are in India. Here, we know the right levers to pull to get things done but over there we don't know which ones to pull.

Lekha implies that part of the allure of returning to India is the power that individuals possess through their networks, i.e. their social capital. Knowing which 'levers to pull' perpetuates advantage, which the SoBo elite are better able to coordinate in India than overseas. Lekha's comment suggests what *actually* matters in the long-term are the local networks and privilege that the elite possess *before* they seek international education – as opposed to the cosmopolitan cultural capital that suburban striver prospective students imagined would facilitate upward mobility.

Returning to India is also a marker of status in itself. Education agents and counsellors consistently told me that "the rich return, the middle class stay" (contrary to the expectations of prospective suburban striver students in Chapter Six). Ronak, a partner at a large education consultancy firm, who comes from an SoBo elite family and is resolute that his children will study overseas once they are older, explained that in the 1980s and 1990s he lived in the UK as a child/adolescent and this was a source of envy for people in India. However, with changes to the availability of consumer products in India and improved lifestyles of the elite, Ronak suggests that living overseas has become 'a middle-class dream':

In the 80s and early 90s people had, like, *nothing* in India. It was a wasteland! But now you can get everything, right, so things have changed a lot here. 20 years ago, when we used to visit, people would be really impressed by us living in the UK and that was something they thought was desirable. Now people are feeling sorry for these guys who live abroad because they have to do their own dishes and washing! ... So now, because people who have the right social infrastructure and have enough money, they have a really good life in India, living abroad then loses its appeal. Living abroad seems, in some ways, like a hard life because you don't have 'the help'. So that's more of a middle-class dream than an affluent dream these days.

Similar to Lehka's comment, Ronak suggests that networks ('social infrastructure') and lifestyle in Mumbai hold greater value for the SoBo elite than migrating out of India. As Ronak says, life abroad is 'harder' than life in India because lifestyles that the elite maintain in Mumbai cannot be replicated overseas without possessing immense wealth. This was reinforced by returned SoBo student Anupama, 25, who suggested that it is better to 'struggle' overseas than in India:

I think that, if you're struggling here in India, then it's much better to live abroad. It's much better to struggle abroad in a nice environment than to struggle here, where it is so hard. At least it's still nice over there.

Ronak and Anupama imply that those below them in Mumbai's class hierarchy do not – and likely will never – possess enough capital to facilitate a 'comfortable' life in India. Being elite in India is thought to be a better lifestyle than one can realistically obtain abroad. The luxuries that SoBo elites are able to access cushions some of the difficulties of living in India and enables them to mediate the local environment. By casting permanent overseas migration as a form of relative hardship, SoBo elites ensure that their status is (re)produced because their return signifies their privilege.

While SoBo elites return to the same privileged lifestyles that they left, 'exposure' via international education does have a transformative effect on the way they value these luxuries and their elite class status. In elucidating the reasons that they were happy to return to India, several SoBo elites cited that they had felt like 'second-class citizens' during their international education, particularly in the USA. Umang, 22, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, described the challenges he faced when transitioning from university to the workplace in the USA, where he worked for several months 'just to gain some exposure' before returning to India to join his family's business:

U: For me, someone made a statement that stuck: 'I would rather be a first-class citizen in a third world country than be a second-class citizen in a first world country'.

N: Why would you be a second-class citizen in America?

U: Number one, I don't own an American passport. Number two, I'm not white. Those two things combined play a big role in how you're perceived after you finish college. When you're in college, you're still in an environment that fosters communication between everyone. But as you start working in the

States you go out into groups and you don't have the same opportunities that seem possible in India.

Although Umang's experience raises important questions about the treatment of non-Western international students in the host country (for further discussion of this, see Baas, 2014; Brown & Jones, 2013; Collins, 2006, 2010; Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Park, 2010; Wu & Wilkes, 2017), his decision to return to India reinforces that the elite have greater opportunity in India because of their existing networks and high levels of capital. For Umang, unlike the suburban strivers, there is no real imperative to endure hardship in the Western labour market. This suggests that the value of cosmopolitan cultural capital is context-dependent as it does not appear to be valued the same in every place, because of the intersections of race and class. Capital cannot erase race or citizenship matters in the US. So, an individual can have significant stores of capital but legal status and race still matter. For SoBo elites, then, returning to Mumbai is about 'leveraging' (or at least having the opportunity to leverage) their status and power in the local context.

Vidya, 25, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, similarly explained that she wanted to return to Mumbai for financial and family reasons, but also because she felt that she would experience sexism and racism if she were to remain in the USA:

I always intended to come back. Here our expenses are low, your family is here and you are well supported. But if it so happened that I ended up overseas then that would've been ok too. But I would always be a second-class citizen in the West. I would always be struggling to make ends meet, and I would be exposed to sexism and racism. The fact is that I'm not white, and that affects your experience.

For Vidya, being a 'second-class citizen' in the West was an undesirable form of (permanent) downward mobility. It is true that non-white female migrants are potentially at a double-disadvantage when they seek international education and/or work overseas (Sondhi & King, 2017; see also Holloway et al., 2012). Interestingly, however, both Vidya and Umang are conscious of structural racism and sexism in the West and its unfairness, but do not appear to perceive class hierarchies and inequalities in India as similarly problematic. For SoBo elites, class-related injustices in India are normalised as part of their everyday lives (cf. Dickey, 2000, 2016). As this section has demonstrated, a privileged position in India allows for a comfortable lifestyle that people aspire and desire to return to.

## DUTY TO FAMILY AND NATION

While returning to India represented maintenance of privilege for SoBo elites and downward mobility for suburban strivers, the notion of returning to India to fulfil a sense of duty to nation and/or family cut across class lines. SoBo elites and suburban strivers equally embedded notions of duty to family or nation within their narratives of return. However, closer analysis reveals that these notions of duty are constructed and experienced differently according to an individual's localised micro-category of class. Recent studies that consider student mobilities have similarly noted the role that a sense of duty can play in return trajectories on the basis of duty to nation (Findlay et al., 2017; Forsberg, 2017; Holloway et al., 2012), as well as duty to family (Sondhi & King, 2017; Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Luthra & Platt, 2016). In this section I contribute to this body of literature by considering how class status colours students' sense of duty to nation or family in nuanced ways, which has been under-explored in this literature.

### Duty to Family

Most participants stated that they have close relationships with their family members, particularly their parents, and that their family's wellbeing was a consideration in their mobility decisions. The notion that family factors into international student mobilities is not new. For instance, educational mobility as a family strategy has been observed in a number of studies, wherein families decide to invest in international education as a preliminary step towards enabling the migration of parents later on (Waters, 2005, 2006a; Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Other scholars have noted the often-fraught relationship between the mobility of young women and familial demands or expectations in the home country (Sondhi & King, 2017; Martin, 2014, 2018). While another group of scholars have noted that decisions about international education are not made by the student alone because the family plays a significant role in determining students' aspirations (Sancho, 2015; King & Raghuram, 2013; Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Sondhi, 2015). This body of literature highlights important facets of the role that family plays in determining and colouring student mobilities, however, the impact of a family's class status is rarely considered in a nuanced way.

SoBo elites returned to India when their parents either demanded or requested that their children return to take up caretaking responsibilities. These appeared to involve 'just

being there’ for parents in an emotional sense. SoBos did not talk about being required to physically care for parents, presumably because employing a paid caregiver is the norm in SoBo households. SoBo elites, however, often reported receiving ‘pressure’ from their parents to return to India, implying that their mobility trajectories are dictated by familial duty. This was reflected by Kunaal, 28, a returned student and lawyer from a SoBo elite family, who stated that he returned to India at the behest of his parents because he has a duty to care for them:

My parents will get older and I will have to take care of them. Long term I wanted to be in India but the question was ‘how soon?’ Whether I would work there for a couple of years and come back or come straight back. In the end I came straight back, mostly at my parents’ insistence! But it’s been okay because I got a good job here.

Similarly, Hiral, mother of a prospective student from a SoBo elite family, explained that her friends and family members often ‘pressured’ their children to return to India to care for them as they grow older:

The parents pressure kids to return after their studies. Usually they don’t mind them staying abroad for a few years, but then they’ll say, ‘We’re getting old, you need to come back and take care of us’. Or, ‘We raised you, now it’s your turn’. ... Families need their kids to be close to them.

These return trajectories imply that, for SoBo elite families, gaining economic capital by working overseas is secondary to ensuring that cultural expectations around emotional care are fulfilled. Sondhi and King (2017) note that, for boys as well as girls, there are expectations around caring for family members which can dictate the return of ‘middle-class’ students to India. However, as these data demonstrate, returning to India to care for parents is typically a marker of elite status. Suburban striver students, who are likely to rely on working abroad in order to repay their loans, are less able to return to India promptly in order to care for aging parents and are not ‘pressured’ to do so. This also reflects a broader body of literature pertaining to transnational care, especially mothering (Parreñas, 2000, 2001; Mahdavi, 2016; Hoang, Yeoh & Wattie, 2012; Radhakrishnan, 2009; Raghuram, 2012; McKay, 2007), where in this empirical context economic care/support can be undertaken at a distance by suburban strivers, but emotional or symbolic care requires the physical proximity of SoBo elites.

Suburban strivers return to India for reasons pertaining to duty only when there is a medical emergency within the family that requires their presence. Suburban strivers otherwise remain overseas in order to earn money that can then be remitted to India to support parents as they age (see also Thomas, 2017; Sondhi, 2015; Osella & Osella, 1999, 2000; Alberts & Hazen, 2005), or the family formulates a migration plan for parents to join their children in the West (see also Waters, 2005, 2006a; Walton-Roberts, 2015a). Navita, 26, a returned student from a suburban striver family, explained that her parents encouraged her and her sister to remain overseas after they graduated in order to earn more money. However, when Navita's father suddenly fell ill, she returned to India to care for him:

My parents always said that we should just stay abroad and they would join us in their old age! [laughs]. My sister did do that, but as you know, I came back to look after my dad when he was sick. ... I guess me coming back was good for my family. But financially, yeah, we would be better off today if I had stayed in Melbourne. Though obviously I wasn't going to do that when my dad was unwell and my mum also needed my support.

Navita's father later passed away, and since the interview she has moved to Canada in order to pursue a master's degree in airport management. Navita explained that she assessed which country's immigration policies were most favourable and applied to study accordingly in order to continue her journey towards migrating out of India permanently. She also explained that part of this consideration was which country had the most favourable family migration policy. Within a few months of leaving Mumbai, Navita's mother had also left Mumbai and currently shuttles between Navita's house in Canada and Navita's sister's house in the USA.

Navita's trajectory differs from the typical SoBo elite arc in two key ways. First, there appears to be a family migration strategy at play, in which Navita and her sister study abroad, seek permanency in that country and their parents then join one of them upon retirement (see also Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Waters, 2005, 2006a; Luthra & Platt, 2016). Second, Navita had to decide between financial gain and caring responsibilities, which reflects responses in the previous section that highlight the vulnerability of suburban strivers. This theme is also present within a large literature on transnational families, in which women in particular are often faced with difficult decisions about familial duty versus financial gain (for example, see Radhakrishnan, 2009; Mahdavi,

2016; Hoang et al., 2012; Raghuram, 2012; McKay, 2007). These two factors are classed in that SoBo elites do not have family migration strategies in play, nor would there be a financial trade-off if a SoBo elite student were to return home to care for a sick parent.

### **Duty to Nation**

The ways in which respondents positioned the duty they feel towards India as a nation was also differently classed. SoBo elites often suggested that they returned to India because their presence could help develop the economy, though this also represented an opportunity to expand their existing capital. For instance, Umang, 22, a returned student from a SoBo elite family, explained that his decision to return to India was partly informed by his ‘nationalism’ and an observation that India holds ‘scope and opportunity’ for him to leverage when he starts his own business:

I'm a strong nationalist – I'm patriotic, for some weird reason. I really believe that this country can progress and I think there is a lot of scope and opportunity in this country. ... So yeah, I was really keen to come back so that I could start my own thing.

Belonging to a well-established business family, Umang is poised to take advantage of the opportunities that arise in India’s emerging economy. Since returning to India, he has successfully launched two new businesses, financed by his father, which (according to Umang) have been able to flourish because of India’s large population and increasing wealth. This implies that although SoBo elites imagine that they cannot acquire cosmopolitan cultural capital within India (as discussed in Chapter Six), they perceive that it is easier for them to accumulate further economic capital by returning to India.

Suburban strivers, on the other hand, were more likely to speak about the potential community benefits that could result from them returning to India. A similar sense of duty to nation or community has also been identified in several other studies. For instance, drawing on the example of a Nigerian student, Findlay et al. (2017: 196) observed a desire to return home that related to “developmental norms”, in which the student wished to contribute to their society. Similarly, participants in a study by Holloway et al. (2012) remarked that they were happy to return to Kazakhstan in order “contribute to the development of the nation” (though, for these students, this was also required under their scholarship conditions). Forsberg (2017) also observed a similar connection to India



among her young middle-class respondents in Kerala, who felt that they had a duty to build the wealth of their country and that remaining in India rather than permanently migrating was ‘honourable’.

Despite the potential honour associated with returning to India to contribute to her growing economy, suburban strivers seemed to have a more fraught relationship with this justification and tended to lack the conviction of SoBo elites that their return would be economically beneficial. Rajni, introduced above as one of the students who had been unable to secure graduate employment overseas, explained that she returned to India in order to contribute to the economy, though she also recognised that remitting money from the USA would also have been a valued contribution:

I want to contribute to the growing economy over here. I mean, I know earning in dollars and sending the money back home also contributes a lot to the economy, but still, I thought that if I did something in India as well I thought it would be good for the entire growth of the community over here too.

Rajni’s narrative of duty to India’s growth justifies and rationalises her premature return, potentially mitigating the negative impacts associated with failed mobility. Unlike Umang (above), however, Rajni frames her contribution to India in terms of the overall community benefit, rather than the ‘scope and opportunity’ that she could leverage upon her return.

Participants from suburban striver backgrounds also imagined returning to India to provide services that would aid the community. Swapnali, 21, a prospective student from a suburban striver family, explained that she would be happy to return to India after completing her qualification in psychology so that she can ‘make a change’, though her return would be contingent on her securing a good job:

If I get the kind of job I expect, then yes, I would love to come back. ... I've noticed that I can make a change, and that feels good. And if you can do it in your own country, what's better than that?

Swapnali’s return to India is conditional: her desire to provide value to the community is outweighed by her career aspirations and the fact that she needs to earn a good wage because, as she explained, her family does not ‘have money to fall back on’. Swapnali’s potential return to India is subject to her own financial security. Conversely, SoBo elite

participants know they can return to India to ‘contribute’ and the cost of their education abroad is not a burden to their families, leaving them free to leverage their existing capital to ‘develop’ India by starting new businesses.

## CONCLUSION

The return trajectories of international students are differently experienced according to localised micro-categories of class. For suburban strivers, returning to India highlights the risks that they take when they pursue an international education. For this group, return can mark an unexpected downward turn in their socio-economic mobility because they are often unable to secure the ‘return on investment’ that was anticipated when they decided to obtain a foreign degree. Suburban strivers rely on leveraging their cosmopolitan cultural capital to get a well-paid job overseas in order to repay their education loans (also discussed in Chapter Five), but returning to India prematurely potentially has negative financial impacts on these families (see also Thomas, 2017; Findlay et al., 2017). Because of these financial risks, suburban strivers are more acutely vulnerable to the often-volatile visa programmes of foreign governments than the SoBo elites. Adding salt to the metaphoric wound of returning too soon, suburban strivers also found that their foreign qualifications were not as highly valued in the Indian job market as they had expected. The merit they anticipated would be ascribed to their degrees was not necessarily valued above local knowledge (for comparison, see Waters, 2009; Waters & Leung, 2017b).

SoBo elites experienced returning to India in very different ways. Perhaps the most important factor that governs the return of the SoBo elite is that they generally have family businesses that they will work in upon their return. This sometimes means that their transnational mobility is fixed and time-sensitive, wherein families allow a specific and constrained period of freedom before expecting young SoBos to return to India. For this group, returning to India marks their privilege as they transition into adulthood and return to the same elite lifestyles in India. SoBo elites can, hypothetically, return to India at any time without making a ‘loss’ because their ‘return on investment’ is not contingent on working overseas. Their ‘return on investment’ is measured in terms of personal growth, independence and self-actualisation. SoBo elites are more concerned with ‘the

experience' than tangible economic outcomes because they already possess capital in India to guarantee their economic security and prosperity.

Although there was some general convergence around notions of duty that were present in the narratives of return of both suburban strivers and SoBo elites, closer analysis revealed that difference was again present according to an individual's localised micro-category of class. Both groups spoke about returning to India to fulfil a duty of care for their families. For SoBo elites, care usually involved being proximate to their families and being emotionally supportive. This also reflects the relatively fixed trajectories of SoBo elites, whose parents sometimes pressure them to return to India. Further, the intergenerational family businesses that SoBo elites typically return to require the proximity of the next generation to continue the business, so parental pressure is also about shoring-up wealth and privilege over time. By contrast, suburban strivers cared for their families by ensuring their physical and economic wellbeing. This group only returned to India to care for their family in the event of a medical emergency, and would otherwise rather work overseas and send remittances to assist in the comfort of the family unit. Suburban strivers did not report feeling pressured by their parents to return and they were also more likely to think about familial migration strategies.

This chapter highlights that, in the context of return trajectories, what actually matters in the long-term are the local networks and privilege that an individual possesses *before* they seek international education. SoBo elites possess higher levels of social capital by virtue of the context in which they grew up, whereas suburban strivers possess less social (as well as other forms of) capital, so their return to India is often problematic. Suburban strivers are therefore never able to 'catch up' to the SoBo elite. These class inequalities were similarly present in the way that young people and their families approach marriage, particularly young women, as the next chapter will discuss.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **‘THE COMPLETE PACKAGE’: INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND MARRIAGE(ABILITY)**

“Girls and guys want to study abroad, they will always love to gain practical knowledge and experience. Once they have completed their studies, they come back as the complete package and then only they get married.”

*– Fazlur, male, education agent*

The data presented in the preceding chapters have highlighted that participants frequently raised the notion of a ‘return on investment’ that they imagined would be derived from their international education by virtue of possessing a ‘stamp’ of having spent time overseas. In this chapter, I explore how ‘the foreign stamp’ relates to the marriage trajectories and marriageability of individuals who have studied overseas, observing that international education is imagined to enhance the marriageability of young women in particular – some of whom seek marriageability as the primary ‘return’ on their educational investment. As Fazlur implies above, the possession of a foreign degree was often imagined as a crucial attribute that ensures that a young person presents as ‘the complete package’ when they participate in the (arranged) marriage market.

In this chapter I find it useful to situate data pertaining to marriage and marriageability within a lifecourses framework (also outlined in Chapter Two), which highlights that international student mobility is not an isolated event, but instead has ongoing and long-lasting impacts on the lives of mobile young people. Several authors have importantly argued that lifecourses are implicitly and always gendered, which differently impacts the trajectories of young men and women (Gardner, 2009; Martin, 2018). Gardner (2009) contends that a lifecourse approach which pays close attention to gender allows research to raise questions about how gendered roles, relationships and identities form and are changed over time as people progress through life. This chapter builds upon this growing body of literature by exploring how international education and marriage relate to one another within the lifecourses of young women in the study,

particularly in terms of how gaining cosmopolitan cultural capital via international education carries different class-specific value in India's arranged marriage market.

Participants suggested that, in relation to marriage and marriageability, men and women are expected to engage differently with international education and to derive different value from being transnationally mobile. Male participants were often reluctant to talk about marriage – they typically stated that they 'haven't thought about it' and appeared to feel less pressure relating to marriage. This is possibly because, for men in India, marriage can mean a less drastic change in their lives because they typically continue to live with their parents and there is no question about whether or not they will continue to work after marriage (Donner, 2016). Women, on the other hand, were acutely aware of when and how their marriage would likely occur and what will be expected of them as a married woman, which typically meant living with their in-laws and possibly stopping work. The reluctance of male participants to discuss marriage meant that I ultimately had a smaller pool of data to draw from in the analysis of this theme – which is reflected in the relative length of this chapter, as well as in the fact that I by necessity focus primarily on female respondents in the analysis. However, the findings presented in this chapter make a unique contribution to how we understand possible outcomes of international education for young people in India.

For young men of both SoBo elite and suburban striver class groups, the normative expectation is that they will become the breadwinner of their household. The value of international education, then, is to enhance employment or business opportunities, which *then* converts to greater value in the marriage market. For women in the sample, whose experiences I focus on in this chapter, international education and marriage are similarly linked in that possessing a foreign degree is perceived to make a woman better 'marriage material'. However, for women, localised micro-categories of class appear to play a more significant role in gendered lifecourse expectations. Specifically, the SoBo elite seek to maintain their existing privilege by using international education to enhance their marriageability, typically marrying shortly after returning to India. Conversely, suburban striver women desire upward socio-economic mobility and often seek to delay their marriages by focusing on higher education and career goals. Although, as this chapter later demonstrates, women from both class groups are typically

bound by normative gendered expectations around marriage, so international education is used to resist gendered norms in a temporary, delineated and limited way. Before turning to the data outlined above, I first summarise relevant literature pertaining to Indian marriages and international student mobility.

## MARRIAGE AND MOBILITY

In India, marriage is a pivotal moment in the lives of young people and their families, often signifying their transition into adult life (Mand, 2005; Dickey, 2016). Scholars have recently observed that marriage practices within the Indian middle class are shifting towards a ‘companionate’ model of equality, love and choice (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008; Gilbertson, 2014a; Donner, 2016; Twamley & Sidharth, 2018; Lukose, 2009). Companionate marriage is, in many respects, an ‘in between’ form of marriage that adheres to caste endogamy and other important considerations in a conventional arranged marriage (such as education levels and employment/earning potential), whilst also incorporating ‘modern’ ideas about individual compatibility and life-long companionship (Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008; Gilbertson, 2014a). For participants in this study, the companionate ideals described above were present in the context of how they imagined arranged marriages. Many respondents implied that love marriages were still considered somewhat rebellious and that to have a love marriage might mean contravening the desires of parents, which would potentially have negative consequences (similarly, see Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008; and conversely, see Donner, 2016; De Neve, 2016).

This shift toward companionate marriage is associated with the emerging middle class’s desire to present a ‘modern’ and ‘progressive’ identity whilst still maintaining a sense of Indian ‘respectability’ (Gilbertson, 2014a; Donner, 2016). Twamley and Sidharth (2018), for example, argue that middle-class women in Mumbai strike a ‘passive bargain’ in which they uphold classed ideals of respectability, which was seen as critically important in order to negotiate a match with a ‘good’ husband. However, as Fuller and Narasimhan (2008: 752) contend, “endogamous companionate marriage, in which partners are primarily selected with reference to their own educational qualifications and employment, and their potential happiness as a compatible couple, is a system that

reproduces both caste and class, specifically ‘middle classness’ as social practice and cultural discourse.”

An emerging body of literature demonstrates that, within the middle classes, weddings and marriage are a key site for the performance of class status (Dickey, 2016; Twamley, 2014; Uberoi, 2008; Donner, 2008, 2016; Gilbertson, 2014a; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008). As Brosius (2010: 269-70) observes, “the combination of weddings, status-definition and spending money is nothing new.” Similarly, education and marriage are closely associated with the reproduction of class status in India (Dickey, 2016; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008; Gilbertson, 2017a; see also Bhopal, 2009). Some scholars have noted a phenomenon of women seeking education specifically to improve their marriage prospects (Forsberg, 2017; Klasen & Pieters, 2015). In a recent study Klasen and Pieters (2015) found that women’s educational attainment in urban India has increased in recent years, yet their labour force participation has remained stagnant since the late 1980s. They argue that this can be partly explained by “rising marriage market returns to education”, meaning that while many more urban Indian women are pursuing tertiary education, many are doing so to improve their marriage prospects rather than their employability (2015: 451). For young upper-middle-class and elite Indians today, international education has come to play an increasingly important role in pre-marriage lives. This all suggests that there are potentially complex relationships between international student mobility, marriage and marriageability in India that require unpacking.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, little is known about how international education relates to marriage in general (for instance, see Neveu Kringelbach, 2015), nor how it relates to the marriages of young Indian people. In one study, Yakaboski et al. (2013) asked South Indian students enrolled in graduate engineering courses at a single US university how marriage relates to their educational mobility. They found that being a transnationally mobile student enhances the marriageability of both men and women, allows for higher or lower dowry prices respectively, provides negotiation space for young people wishing to have a ‘love marriage’, and affords men and women a potential “time-stop on their marriage clocks” (2013: 53). In a second study, Sondhi and King (2017) argue that for Indian students in Canada, gender is a crucial factor in their return migration (or reluctance to return). Men were more likely to return or imagine returning



to India, whereas women tended to seek strategies that would allow them to work and live outside of India. This chapter demonstrates that the division of who returns and who stays is, however, perhaps less to do with gender and more indicative of an individual's class status in India.

A small number of studies have also explored how marriage relates to non-Western international student mobilities (Martin, 2018; Holloway et al., 2012; Xiang & Chen, 2009; Neveu Kringelbach, 2015; for examples of other research that considers marriage, gender and non-Western mobilities, see Karupiah, 2018; Khoo & Yeoh, 2018; Jones, 2009; Constable, 2005; Bélanger & Linh, 2011; Palriwala, Uberoi & Thapan, 2008). For instance, Holloway et al. (2012) find that for middle-class Kazakhstani women who have returned home, their foreign education is an important component of middle-class social reproduction because they are able to secure well-paid employment. However, this can come at a cost in their personal lives, wherein Kazakhstani men expect to earn more than their wives and women are still expected to uphold heterosexual marriage ideals, which can create conflict within marital relationships. This suggests that – as Robertson et al. (2018a) also argue – despite the possibilities that transnational mobility offers young women to rescript their (ideal or normative) gender roles at home, gender relations often remain unchanged. International education (and other forms of transnational mobility) thus becomes a way for young women to pause or suspend their lives temporarily.

In a recent study of middle-class Chinese women studying in Australia, Fran Martin (2018) finds that young women use their time overseas as a 'zone of suspension' within their lifecourses, wherein geographic distance facilitates temporary deferral of gendered expectations around 'settling down', marriage and child-bearing. Young women use this time and space to develop a sense of self, to engage in intimate relationships of varying 'seriousness', and *potentially* renegotiate normative lifecourse scripts. However, there remain persistent lifecourse expectations around the 'right' time for women to marry. Among the young women I spoke to, a similar notion of a 'zone of suspension' within the gendered lifecourse was evident. Throughout this chapter, I argue that localised micro-categories of class differently impact how international student mobility is used by women to temporarily suspend their lives in India. This is a time to

‘party’ or to focus on their careers, depending on whether they belong to the SoBo elite or suburban strivers.

## HOUSEWIVES VERSUS CAREER WIVES

In this section, I more closely unpack how localised micro-categories of class differently impact the gendered lifecourses of transnationally mobile young women in relation to their marriages and marriageability. Participants considered whether or not a woman is expected to work after marriage as contingent on class status and corresponding gendered lifecourses. Lekha, an education counsellor who runs her own business, explained that a woman’s class status determines what she is expected to do after she marries:

[Business families] want a woman to stay at home in the kitchen or with the kids, they don’t want someone who is ambitious ... so upper class women are actually quite disadvantaged in many ways. The upper class can tend to be more conservative than the middle class when it comes to earning and employment for women. On the other hand, the middle class see an educated girl as a huge bonus. They think, ‘Great, dual income!’

According to Lekha, as well as many other respondents who echoed this perspective, whether or not a woman is expected to work after marriage is a marker of class status. SoBo elite women, who typically belong to wealthy families that own medium-to-large businesses, were assumed to marry into families of similar socio-economic standing and subsequently become housewives. Career ambitions were considered, in this class strata, to decrease rather than increase a woman’s marriageability. Whereas suburban strivers were perceived as career-oriented women who would continue to work after marriage. Within this class micro-category, potential in-laws could consider women’s income-earning capacity as a ‘bonus’. This also reflects findings presented in previous chapters pertaining to different class-specific values ascribed to gaining ‘exposure’, where the symbolic value of cosmopolitan cultural capital was prioritised by SoBo elites while suburban strivers sought to enhance their careers and earning potential.

SoBo elite women – and their families, by extension – use international education as a tactic to enhance their marriageability in the Indian arranged marriage market (see also Sondhi & King, 2017; Yakaboski et al., 2013), which allows this group to (re)produce their privileged class status in Mumbai. For this group, a foreign degree and

time spent overseas is a rite of passage, a ‘stamp’ of prestige that they acquire and is then deployed in India’s arranged marriage market. As one of my SoBo friends once joked, obtaining a foreign degree is “biodata compliant”<sup>34</sup>. Respondents tended to observe that the ‘value’ of SoBo elite women increases once they return to India for two key reasons: one, that their family is wealthy enough to pay for an international education that women do not use to seek employment, and two, time spent overseas is imagined to ‘broaden the horizons’ of young people, making them ‘global citizens’ (as discussed in Chapter Six; see also Sancho, 2015; Gilbertson, 2017a; Collins et al., 2017; Rizvi, 2014).

Many participants suggested that international education enhances women’s marriageability, including Zeenia, 25, a returned student from a SoBo elite family. Zeenia’s family was different to most SoBo elites in the sample in that they were working professionals in high-paid positions rather than business owners. Zeenia had grown up in South Mumbai and had attended an elite high school with children from business families, so – as she explains – she has many female friends who fit the archetypal model of the SoBo elite who pursued international education simply because ‘it adds a premium to you’:

I think going abroad improves their marriageability. ... It just makes you sound like you’ve lived abroad so you’ve got a new perspective, it adds a premium to you – especially if you want to marry into an equally wealthy family.

Naina, 24, a prospective student from a SoBo elite family, echoed Zeenia’s comments when she suggested that young women use international education to ‘build their marriage profile’:

My female friends who are from extremely wealthy families, they went abroad to study just because they can, and also because they're from the Marwari community and they get married early, so studying abroad is just something to build their marriage profile. ... I think they’ve always known that this is how it’s going to be, so they had a great time for those three years because it was the time they got to sow their wild oats, because once they came back they got married off. ... Today none of them are working – they're generally just socialites.

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<sup>34</sup> Biodata is a term commonly used to describe the information that families share with other families when they are seeking a spouse for their child. This is typically a one-page document that contains information about an individual’s education, professional life, habits, aesthetics, caste and family. This document is also commonly called a ‘marriage résumé’.

These responses summarise normative lifecourse expectations of young SoBo elite women, who are expected to complete their education and then return to India to marry into an ‘an equally wealthy family’, as Zeenia had put it. This highlights that the accumulation of cosmopolitan cultural capital via international education is expected to hold primarily symbolic value for SoBo elite women upon their return to India.

That international education can be sought with the express goal of enhancing marriageability adds a new dimension to literature that examines the outcomes of student mobilities, and also reflects aforementioned findings about education having increased marriage market returns in India (Sondhi & King, 2017; Yakaboski et al., 2013). Students from other class groups (including suburban strivers, discussed below), are unlikely to be able to engage with international education without aspiring to achieve a ‘return on investment’ that generally corresponds to getting a better job (as discussed in Chapters Six and Seven). SoBo elites, however, already possess ‘enough’ economic capital to secure their futures, so emphasis is then placed on ensuring that their social status is maintained by marrying according to familial and community expectations (see also Donner, 2016; De Neve, 2016). Literature on the changing marriage practices of India’s middle classes suggests that companionate marriages based on principles of love and equality rather than duty and hierarchy are increasingly embraced. The paid employment of the wife is often cited as a foundation for this increased emphasis on equality. In prior research, Indian middle-class participants have associated companionate marriage practices with the ‘modern’ identities of the relatively affluent. It is the lower classes who are assumed to be more conservative in their marriage practices (Gilbertson, 2014a; Donner, 2016; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008). Contrary to these associations between class status and more equal dual income marriages, this study demonstrates that the elite can in fact be more conservative when it comes to marriage.

For SoBo elite women, international education then comes to represent a period of ‘freedom’ from home in which young women can ‘party’ before returning to India to take up cultural and familial responsibilities. Importantly, the ‘fun’ and ‘freedom’ that SoBo elites experience occurs outside India, which ensures that their activities are not visible to their community at home. This appears to reflect observations made by other scholars in relation to Indian women ‘balancing’ their identities in order to enact

‘respectable’ womanhood (Radhakrishnan, 2009, 2011; Twamley & Sidharth, 2018; Flemming, 2016; see also Liechty, 2003). While scholars have described this phenomenon in relation to middle-class women and tensions between commitments to career and family (Radhakrishnan, 2011), or between fashionable and modest clothing (Gilbertson, 2014b), this chapter adds a new perspective in relation to international education and class status. Women belonging to India’s elite seek transnational mobility as they transition to adulthood and come of marriageable age, but as part of this rite of passage they are assumed – or expected – to engage in leisure activities (drinking, partying, smoking, ‘hooking up’) that would potentially jeopardise their ‘respectability’ in India. International education thereby allows young women to ‘save face’ (Dickey, 2013) by creating geographic space between home and the site at which they choose to exercise their ‘freedom’.

This freedom from home allows SoBo elite women to temporarily suspend their lifecourse in India (see also Martin, 2018), which allows them a period of independence whilst simultaneously enhancing their status in the marriage market by acquiring a foreign degree and the cosmopolitan cultural capital that is associated with having studied overseas. Ankit, an education counsellor catering to South Mumbai’s elite (and who hails from a SoBo elite family), pointed out this trend among his clients:

They go abroad specifically because their value would increase here. ... Because some upper-class girls, ... they’ve told me very categorically that, ‘Look, I’m 21, I’m going to get married in two years for sure because my parents won’t let me stay single this long and therefore I will have one year’. ... They enjoy themselves in that year and then they come back, and they’re more suited in the marriage market because they have a foreign degree as well.

Zeena (introduced above), echoed Ankit’s observation that for SoBo elite women, international education is a hiatus from home that enables them to ‘party’ before they return to India to marry:

A lot of my wealthier girlfriends went abroad because they can. ... Their parents will let them go for one big party, then they come back and get married.

These comments reveal that, for SoBo elite women, international education is used as a way to seek geographic distance from home and pause their lifecourse to allow them to engage in activities that would otherwise be unacceptable in India. These comments also

highlight that for this group of women, the timing of their marriage is relatively fixed within their lifecourses – as soon as they complete their education, they become eligible to enter the marriage market. Furthermore, these comments reinforce the notion that the primary value of international education for SoBo elite (and men) is symbolic and will enhance their marriageability.

Participants consistently stated that SoBo elites sought international education ‘just for the sake of it’ or ‘because they can’, implying that a foreign degree is a frivolous undertaking for the SoBo elites. This was affirmed by SoBo elites themselves, who often acknowledged that their time overseas was primarily about ‘having fun’, which could only happen when their leisure activities were not surveilled by their families and/or networks in India. This was explained by Geeta, 22, a returned student from a SoBo elite family:

A lot of us were there just to have fun. ... Us girls knew that we would go back and get married pretty much straight away. So there was all this madness going on, like heaps of hook-ups and everyone just enjoying their freedom while it lasts. Because, like, uh, at home you're always on guard, you're always aware that someone might see you doing something you shouldn't be doing!

Soon after returning from the UK, Geeta's parents introduced her to a man that she would later marry, which is typical of contemporary arranged marriage practices (Donner, 2016), and would be asked to stop working because her future husband's family did not want her to. For Geeta, like most SoBo elite participants, international education is space in which she can resist some expectations of feminine respectability in a temporary, delineated and limited way. In some respects, this reflects other global framings of youth mobility as a period of freedom and unsettling of normative expectations before ‘settling down’ into adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2015; Friberg, 2012; Desforges, 1998; Martin, 2018). However, SoBo elites consistently return to the same life in India in which prescriptive gendered expectations of domesticity and respectability are enforced.

By contrast, for women from suburban striver backgrounds international education is a time and space to (potentially) renegotiate gendered scripts by pursuing career goals and delaying or attempting to avoid their marriages, which correlates to earlier findings around suburban strivers' desire to advance their careers by gaining

exposure. For suburban striver women, marriage is still an event that they anticipate as part of their lifecourse, but they wish to redefine the time at which marriage will occur by pursuing international education. This was seen as crucial in order to advance their career goals. Savita, an education counsellor and returned student from a suburban striver family, who was in her early-30s and unmarried at the time of the interview, explained the advantages of using international education to ‘buy time’ in relation to getting married:

See, if you stay abroad then it gives you more time to work on your career, to build it up, you know. ... And, even for girls, if you have a better job then you can get a better match. So in the long run, you’re better off if you can buy time and delay your parents for a bit.

By ‘delay your parents’, Savita is referring to postponing the pressure that one’s family places on children to marry at a certain age (see also Martin, 2018). She suggests, somewhat contradictorily, that delaying marriage allows young women to build careers overseas which can enhance marriageability in the arranged marriage market, but also implies that marriage and work are generally incompatible. This is possibly because Indian brides almost always move to wherever her husband is based (Jones, 2009; Walton-Roberts, 2015a), so they are more likely to abandon or change jobs after marriage.

Suburban striver women typically expected to work throughout their adult lives, but there was a persistent sense that getting married would negatively impact one’s career trajectory, despite the aforementioned desirability of a ‘dual income’ union. This was confirmed by Purvi, 24, a prospective student from a suburban striver family, who talked at length about the anticipated effect that becoming a mobile student would have on the timing of her marriage:

Staying back in the US might delay my marriage for a bit too, so I will be able to work on my career more before I get married. Then I would be happy! [laughs]. ... Six months back when I was planning for my studies, my mum was like, ‘It’s better if now, rather than studying, you get married’. Being in a Gujarati family, they think that 24-25 is the *proper* age to get married. ... So that thing comes with the parents, that ‘my daughter should get settled soon’. They always have that in their minds.

Purvi explained that her desire to pursue a graduate qualification had caused tension within her family, especially with her mother, who preferred that she marry rather than study. Purvi’s family’s desire for her to marry is linked to normative expectations about the role of (married) women and the ‘right’ time for young women to marry within their

lifecourses. Purvi resisted these expectations by using international education to negotiate an alternative timeline. However, she went on to explain that, ultimately, she will return to India to marry a boy from the same sub-caste and become a daughter-in-law in a joint family (see Donner, 2016; and for discussion of caste in relation to marriage, see Dickey, 2016; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008). For Purvi, her marriage into a ‘conservative’ family would likely limit her ability to work, so international education provided an avenue for her to pursue career and lifestyle goals that might evade her after marriage:

It depends on the guy’s family. I would have to ask for their permission basically, because [Gujarati] families don’t like girls to be working. ... So living a lifestyle that *they* want, I cannot do that right now. I want do something of my own! ... I know I’m not ready [for marriage] because ... after I get married, I would have to look after [his] family and I would have new responsibilities.

Though Purvi stated that she wants to continue to build a career after she marries, she explained that she equally feels a sense of ‘duty’ towards her family and would marry according to their desires. International education therefore provides a temporary stopgap for young women who wish to delay their marriages in order to pursue other goals, before returning to India to resume their position within patriarchal family hierarchies. This potentially suggests that, contrary to the imaginaries and aspirations of suburban strivers detailed in previous chapters, international education may ultimately come to hold symbolic value for suburban striver women if they are not able to advance their careers in the ways that they anticipated.

Within the suburban strivers group, there appears to be different expectations around the role that married women play within the family. The data suggest that suburban striver women – unlike SoBo elite women – *can* possibly work after marriage, but this will have to be negotiated with in-laws and husbands and worked around the primary domestic role. Despite the potential for gender roles to be renegotiated within this group who are upwardly mobile and career-orientated, there is never a suggestion that women could share domestic responsibility and equal emphasis on career with men, nor any suggestion that women could marry *and* be the breadwinner, nor be an independent single woman in India. Instead, this is very much contingent on the values of the family that women marry into, or a decision to remain overseas in order to avoid



marriage altogether (see also Radhakrishnan, 2008, 2011, for another example of how professional Indian women balance family and career responsibilities and aspirations).

For a smaller number of women from suburban striver families, international education offered a strategy for them to possibly avoid marriage entirely. Krupa, 25, a prospective student from a suburban striver family, explained that she does not wish to get married, but that she was having trouble communicating her desires to her family. Krupa anticipated that becoming transnationally mobile for educational purposes would allow her to create distance between herself and her family which would provide more space for her to negotiate with her parents:

Soon I'll turn 26 and then my parents will *really* start bugging me with the whole marriage topic. So for me, [going abroad] is also an escape from this whole thing. Of course my *priority* is to get a master's degree, but however, at the same time, I'm also getting a solution to the whole marriage problem. Like, I've *had* this conversation with them, I've *told* them! But they don't understand if I try to tell them that it's not important for me to get married in my life. ... My mum will say things like, 'Everything should happen at the *right time*'. But then there's no right time – you can do what you want, when you want! ... If I go abroad, then I can get some space from them, and maybe I can get them to understand what *I* want in life.

For Krupa, international education represents a 'solution' to her 'marriage problem'. This tactic was echoed by Swapnali, 21, a prospective student intending to pursue a PhD in Australia, who explained that her 'typical Indian' father wanted her to marry by a certain age, but that seeking international education would allow her to subvert his desires:

The typical Indian father, his main concern is to get his daughter married off in a well-to-do family with a good boy. ... And he always keeps saying, like, how long are you going to study? And at the end you are just going to get married. So it's like that. ... He can't accept that marriage is out of the question for me.

Swapnali went on to explain that her father believed that she should start looking for a husband when she turns 24, and that conflict had resulted within their household because pursuing a PhD would disrupt – and potentially displace – her father's desired lifecourse timeline. Swapnali further explained that her desires to complete a PhD had raised questions about how much education is 'too much' for a woman, though her father's primary concern was the timing of her marriage rather than her level of education.

Women from both class groups suggested that there exists a widely-held notion that a woman can be ‘too educated’ and that this would negatively impact her marriageability. Tanmaya, 29, a returned student and education counsellor from a suburban striver family, explained that she would be discouraged from pursuing a PhD because finding a suitable husband with equivalent educational credentials would be difficult:

If I wanted to study beyond a master’s then I would be told to stop. Say if I decide to take up a PhD, people would try to discourage me by saying, ‘Oh then you will require a guy who has a PhD or above’. And there’s not many! So I would be discouraged from doing that. They will say, ‘How many years would that take you? You have to get married by then or before this, when will you have babies?’ ... They would rather discourage a girl than encourage her.

Participants suggested that women from SoBo elite families are similarly discouraged from pursuing higher degrees because it could jeopardise their marriageability. Lekha, an education counsellor and returned student from a SoBo elite family, explained that potential in-laws might see an educated woman as a ‘threat’:

There’s a standard joke in the upper class, that if you’re a woman you shouldn’t become too educated because then you won’t be able to find a match, to find a husband basically. As a woman, if you are too educated then you become a threat. A lot of men in India, not to mention their families, don’t want strong women.

Regardless of class status, women are ultimately bound by normative expectations of feminine duty to the family as mothers and caregivers. Furthermore, men are not expected to ‘marry up’ in the same way that women are. Women are expected to confine themselves educationally to ensure that they remain equal or ‘less than’ men, at least on paper, to ensure that they remain attractive in the arranged marriage market. International education is therefore potentially a ‘contradictory resource’ (Jeffrey, 2010) for many young women, who are expected to become highly qualified but whose ambitions are curtailed by their families as well as society at large.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has importantly highlighted that attending to granularities within a single class group reveals divergent and gendered lifecourse expectations and experiences

relating to international education, which future research should seek to understand further in different empirical contexts. International students are often understood as belonging to a global middle class (see Thomas, 2017; Sancho, 2015; Baas, 2016; Martin, 2018), but localised and heterogeneous manifestations of class status are under-explored in relation to how they impact international student mobility (for an exception, see Luthra & Platt, 2016). Moreover, literature on India's middle classes consistently overlooks the role of transnational mobility in the formation and (re)production of privilege and status in India. The key contribution of this chapter has been to demonstrate how international education and marriage are entangled within the gendered lifecourses of young Indian women, and how localised micro-categories of class and gender are crucial factors in determining the ways in which international education and marriage/marriageability relate to one another.

Participants suggested that international education enhances the marriageability of men and women, but that localised micro-categories of class govern the lifecourses of young women in particular. That is, expectations and experiences of international education are intertwined with marriage and marriageability for both SoBo elite and suburban striver young women, but in very different ways. SoBo elites expect women to return to India soon after completing their international education in order to marry and resume their place in elite Mumbai society. International education is imagined to enhance the 'value' of SoBo elite women within the arranged marriage market, though they are not expected to utilise their educational credentials to pursue a career. Rather, international education is a way for young women to attain geographic distance from home that allows them to 'party' without potentially compromising their respectability. On the other hand, women from suburban striver families are more likely to seek international education as an opportunity to delay or avoid marriage in order to pursue their careers. These women aim to remain overseas for as long as they can, leveraging geographic distance from home to renegotiate the timing of their marriages, or seeking to avoid marriage altogether.

The data suggest that suburban striver women are expected to marry soon after they complete their education, much like SoBo elite women. However, this group sees international education as an opportunity to negotiate alternate timelines, as opposed to a hiatus from home that allows them to enhance their marriageability in order to (re)produce

privilege by marrying into an 'equally wealthy' family. Suburban striver women are also not necessarily expected to stop working after they marry, so building a career is perhaps of greater importance to this group, though the desire to work can also create tension within families when elder generations have different ideas about how married women should progress through life.

Despite these different lifecourse trajectories that are governed by localised micro-categories of class, the data suggest that there remains a fairly fixed set of gendered lifecourse expectations for all young women. Women in the study expected that they would marry, that they would marry a man considered suitable by their family, and that their husband would be the primary breadwinner while they would be primarily responsible for the domestic sphere. Furthermore, participants understood that women should not become 'too educated' for fear of not being able to secure a husband. International education is thus imagined to benefit the marriageability of young women from all class groups, but it does not seem to radically change the long-term trajectories of upper-middle-class and elite women. For young women of both class groups, international student mobility allowed them some limited and delineated time and space to negotiate around the 'edges' of a relatively fixed gendered lifecourse.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSION

In the final stages of writing and reflecting on the findings of my research, I returned to *BuzzFeed India*'s 'privilege checklist' that had inspired the opening paragraphs of this thesis. I was curious as to whether anything novel would jump off the page as I scrolled through the long list of apparent markers of privilege. Much of the list still rings true and most of the participants in this study would indeed check most of the boxes. Interestingly, however, some of the items highlighted variances between suburban strivers and SoBo elites, indicating that each group is perhaps privileged in slightly different ways. For instance:

- ☐ I chose my own career path.

Despite their ostensibly more privileged lifestyles and superior economic, social and cultural capital, most SoBo elites did not have a great deal of agency in choosing their own career paths. The vast majority were expected to join the family business and would likely face consequences from their families if they decided not to perpetuate the family's business legacy. By contrast, suburban strivers were usually able to pursue a career of their choosing, though their families would expect that their career decisions consider earning potential – especially given that loans need to be repaid and upward socio-economic mobility is central to the aspirations of suburban strivers.

The mobility of young women for educational purposes was also similarly differentiated along class lines. As the *BuzzFeed* quiz poses:

- ☐ Women in my family are given the same access to education as men.

SoBo elite women appeared to receive the same educational opportunities as SoBo men. These families possess adequate capital to send several children abroad to study, and they also had more 'exposure' and were therefore more 'comfortable' with their children studying overseas. Suburban striver women, on the other hand, were more likely to face resistance to their mobility desires, with families tending to be less willing to send their daughters overseas to study due to safety concerns. However, this study has also suggested that suburban striver women would be more likely (though not guaranteed) to

check the following boxes, indicating that in the long-term they are perhaps more autonomous than SoBo elite women in determining their own life paths:

- ☐ My family cares more about my career than my marriage.
- ☐ I am not under any pressure to get married.

Suburban striver women were more likely to be allowed to focus on their careers and use this to deflect any pressure to marry, whereas SoBo elite women were often expected to forego career aspirations in order to marry in line with their elite socio-economic status. For women, localised class status can mean that boundaries and expectations around feminine ‘respectability’ are more or less strict, or perhaps differently defined.

The *BuzzFeed* survey also highlighted that there are factors or actions associated with disadvantage in India that are sought out by the relatively elite as an ‘experience’ in the West. For instance:

- ☐ I’ve never cleaned a commode.

The returned students in my study would click this box if they were to take the quiz, even though this is not a task that they would ordinarily perform in India. Cleaning a commode is part of the ‘experience’ that SoBo elites in particular desire, which is indicative of the temporary downward mobility that they anticipate as part of studying abroad. This then converts to symbolic capital upon their return to India. Suburban strivers would also check this box, but may not similarly view cleaning a commode as a valuable part of their experience – this group would more likely endure this as part of what is required to achieve career advancement by living and working overseas.

The *BuzzFeed* quiz highlights how people belonging to different localised micro-categories of class discussed in this study experience privilege in distinctive ways. These differences are made particularly clear when examined in relation to international student mobility. Literature on international student mobilities has tended to classify non-Western international students as belonging to a ‘global middle class’. There is a lack of awareness in this literature of how nuanced articulations of class status can impact the trajectories and experiences of mobile students. This is one of the key gaps that this study has sought

to address. I have positioned this alongside another significant and related area that requires further scholarly attention, which is the role of transnational mobility in (re)producing class status in India. Studies of India's middle class have typically been conducted within national boundaries and have also largely overlooked the upper-middle class and elite. This study has demonstrated that transnational mobility – especially cosmopolitan cultural capital that participants anticipated gaining by being mobile – plays a central role in how individuals (and their families) intend or expect to reproduce their privilege across their lifecourse as they transition from education to work and/or marriage. These expectations distinctly correlate with localised micro-categories of class.

Although participants are predominantly of privileged backgrounds in India, this thesis has demonstrated that how individuals engage with international education is often dichotomous according to localised micro-categories of class. For SoBo elites, pursuing international education is *presupposed*. This group is raised in elite environments that assume transnational mobility will be a component of their transition to adulthood, and they are subsequently equipped with the capital required to achieve this form of mobility (Chapters Four and Six). Particularly noteworthy is that SoBo elites have typically accumulated cosmopolitan cultural capital prior to engaging with international education, which suburban strivers generally have not. Suburban strivers, by contrast, experience mobility as *aspirational*. It is not assumed from an early age that they will study overseas, so transnational mobility is rather an outcome of favourable circumstances (such as newly acquired familial capital or academic talents of the child), as well as the desire to achieve upward socio-economic mobility (Chapter Six). This highlights the importance of conceptualising class, lifecourses and transnational mobility as interwoven factors and studying them in relation to one another.

Pursuing international education for SoBo elites is thus an *expression* of their privilege. SoBo elites seek transnational mobility as a 'natural' part of their lifecourses, which then becomes an expression of their 'inherent' cosmopolitanism (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight). Because of the pre-existing capital possessed by SoBo elites they are able to move relatively seamlessly between places and spaces, which allows them to focus on the 'experience' of international education. International education is thus an exercise in self-actualisation and gaining cosmopolitan cultural capital that will convert to

symbolic value when SoBo elites return to India. For suburban strivers, on the other hand, international student mobility is a *response* to global circumstances (such as increasingly competitive job markets; see also Fernandes, 2000; Roulin & Bangerter, 2013; Anant et al., 2006; Mazumdar & Sarkar, 2008). This group does not possess the inherited cosmopolitan cultural capital of the SoBo elite, so mobility has to be learned and capital must be consciously acquired (Chapter Six). Suburban strivers therefore tend to be more vulnerable in the process of pursuing international education (Chapter Five), and experience international education in an uneven way. Their lack of inherited capital can mean that they do not move comfortably across borders, which can put them at risk financially as well as disadvantage them socially (Chapters Five, Six and Seven).

When suburban strivers pursue international education, they are being educated in transnationalism. They are learning a system of international opportunity and benefits, and so their mobilities are primarily *transactional*. Suburban strivers view transnational mobility as a series of actions with consequences: ‘if I do X (obtain a foreign degree), then I will get Y (a better job)’. SoBo elites, by contrast, are *living* the ‘experience’ of a distinctive global cosmopolitanism; this is ‘who they are’. This group is inherently global, and so international education is an expression of their self. They are not being educated in transnationalism because they already believe they possess international sensibilities. International education is therefore just further preparation for their transition to elite adulthood. They already possess the resources (capital) they need and so their transnational mobility is about living and embodying their privilege. This highlights some of the granularities that exist within the ‘in between’ stage of the lifecourse wherein young people transition to adulthood and personal and professional transformations are desired and pursued (Robertson, 2018). This study has demonstrated that class statuses (specifically localised micro-categories of class) appear to be at the centre of how these granularities are made and reinforced.

Attending to these granular differences between localised micro-categories of class has important implications for how scholars understand experiences pertaining to international education. One of the key functions of this thesis is to demonstrate how international education is valued differently by people belonging to each class category. This in turn highlights the importance of not treating international students from one



country as a homogenous group, as well as the need for a more nuanced approach to conceptualising ‘the middle’. Notions of ‘exposure’ provided perhaps the clearest example of how attending to localised class status can reveal different expectations and aspirations within a student cohort (Chapter Six). I have theorised that the notion of ‘exposure’ mirrors the academic concept of cosmopolitan cultural capital, but that there are differing ideas as to what constitutes legitimate evidence of exposure. Suburban strivers imagined that they would accumulate cosmopolitan cultural capital by acquiring a ‘practical’ education, which would allow them to gain a foothold in a foreign workplace and subsequently advance their careers. Upward socio-economic mobility was the central reason for suburban strivers to gain exposure. On the other hand, SoBo elites anticipated gaining exposure in order to self-actualise. For this group, exposure as a form of cosmopolitan cultural capital held a primarily symbolic value that marked them as part of Mumbai’s elite, which could only be ‘cashed in’ by returning to Mumbai.

Notions of trajectories or pathways were central to how mobilities were anticipated and experienced by participants. For the SoBo elites, international education is ‘time out’ and there is a fixed sense of what ‘comes next’ in that one returns to the ‘same’ life of privilege. Their mobility trajectories are normative, but not particularly transformative. For this group, the success of an international education is measured in terms of ‘personal growth’, ‘independence’ and self-actualisation because they already possess economic capital in India that will guarantee their long-term economic security and prosperity. Suburban strivers, by contrast, expect international education to be transformative, but their trajectories are also more precarious and unexpected outcomes are more likely. Suburban strivers anticipate that international education will enhance their career prospects, however, suburban strivers who return to India can find that this marks an unexpected downturn in their socio-economic mobility. Suburban strivers found that local job markets did not necessarily value foreign experience or qualifications above local knowledge. This often meant that suburban strivers were unable to secure the short-term ‘return on investment’ that they had expected.

Despite these differences, both class categories are subject to relatively fixed expectations around what the sequencing of events within the lifecourse *should* be, especially for young women. In some cases, individuals – particularly suburban strivers

– negotiate what *does* happen next in practice by re-mapping their career pathways or marriage timing (though often not without difficulty). For the mostpart, however, young women are subject to normative expectations around ‘proper’ and ‘safe’ behaviours which can limit their mobilities (Chapter Six), as well as fairly static expectations around who and when to marry (Chapter Eight). Young men seem to have more space to negotiate their lifecourse trajectories, but are also expected to uphold their role as primary breadwinner and ultimately enter into a heterosexual marriage ideally with someone from the same caste and community (see also Fuller & Narasimhan, 2008; Gilbertson, 2014a; Donner, 2016; De Neve, 2016; Bêteille, 1991, 1996; Still, 2011).

Approaching the data from a lifecourse perspective, which focuses on pathways such as those described above, contributes to an emerging body of research that seeks to address an imbalance in terms of how youth mobilities and transitions are conceptualised. Several scholars have noted that research on youth mobilities has tended to focus on Westerners (Collins, 2014; Robertson, 2015). In a recent article, Robertson et al. (2018a) argue that there is a need to attend to how transitions to adulthood are imagined and experienced in the Asia-Pacific, especially in relation to educational mobilities. They further note that the Asia-Pacific is “a site in which different understandings of youth as a life-stage are currently co-mingling and transforming in cross-cultural encounters, constantly shifting even as social and economic transformation reshapes local understandings of what it means to move towards adult life” (2018a: 615). My research adds to the lifecourses literature not only by providing a novel case study, but also because it crucially highlights that Western and non-Western youth mobilities are not necessarily unlike. The SoBo elites in this study tend to mirror much of the research about youth mobilities primarily from Western Europe, in which self-actualisation and the experience of a new place are central motivations to become mobile (Wilson, Fisher & Moore, 2010; Desforges, 1998; Waters, Brooks & Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Waters & Brooks, 2010). In this respect, SoBo elites potentially have more in common with mobile European students than with other Indian international students, who are often viewed as a middle-class group seeking permanent migration and career advancement overseas (Thomas, 2017; Baas, 2010; Walton-Roberts, 2015a; Waters, 2006a; Robertson, 2013) – much like the suburban strivers in this study. This finding reinforces the call that I made throughout this

thesis, that localised class statuses must be studied together with mobility practices and lifecourses as interlaced factors that shape international student mobilities.

Ultimately, international education is expensive and requires access to economic capital. For both class groups in this study, the pursuit of international education also speaks to modes of classed distinction by which the elite assert their superior cultural capital – often disguised as merit, hard work and talent (see also Radhakrishnan, 2011; Upadhy, 2016a). This finding correlates to a broader literature on class in India and how individuals toil to distinguish themselves from others by accumulating various forms of (cosmopolitan) cultural capital. Relevant literature concerning class and education in India, much of which is anthropological, demonstrates that at every class gradient there are strategies that individual students and their families employ to differentiate themselves. Craig Jeffrey's (2010) lower-middle-class participants distinguished themselves by performing distinctly urban identities, as opposed to rural identities. Amanda Gilbertson's (2014c, 2017a) middle-class respondents sought to attend 'international' schools rather than local schools. And Fazal Rizvi (2014) discusses how old elite schools distinguish themselves from mushrooming international schools in India. The respondents in this study represent another aspect of this process of class distinction in relation to education. Using international education and all the advantages that accompany that experience, respondents differentiate themselves from those who cannot access international education, as well as from those who access international education in 'different' ways.

How class boundaries are made has been an important question posed by studies of the Indian middle class. For instance, Jodhka and Prakash (2016) ask: "What does it mean to be middle class in India today? ... Who would ... qualify to be a middle-class person, and on what criteria? ... What role does the middle class play, *beyond economics*, in culture, in democratic politics, and in shaping India's position in the emerging world order?" (xvii, emphasis added). Although these questions are inevitably difficult to answer, this study offers an important contribution towards a fuller picture of how class works in India. This thesis has demonstrated that the boundaries between the upper-middle class and elite are constantly under negotiation. SoBo elites position their cultural capital (particularly cosmopolitan cultural capital) as superior to that possessed by

suburban strivers, suggesting that there was a limit to the upward socio-economic mobility of suburban strivers. SoBo elites implied, for instance, that there is a 'right amount' of exposure and a 'way of being' that correlates to a certain volume of cosmopolitan cultural capital, neither of which suburban strivers are thought to achieve or possess. Collins et al.'s (2014: 671) observation rings true here: "Higher education is not a destination in itself; it carries no guarantees of 'successful' transformation of the self but rather hinges on ongoing investments in knowledge acquisition, and social networks that can leverage opportunities in the future." For suburban strivers, their investment is much greater relative to the SoBo elite, and so the risks they take are also greater (see also Thomas, 2017). From the outset, suburban strivers are more vulnerable than the SoBo elite, from the agents they consult and the loans they take (Chapter Five), to the return on investment that must be realised in order for the expense of studying abroad to be worthwhile in economic terms (Chapters Six and Seven).

Understanding these nuances importantly draws attention to several key factors that I argue will become increasingly significant in the future, which this study prefaces. It is important to study elite members of any society, but especially those in societies such as India where the wealth gap between the elite and the 'rest' is significant, and where there is also a growing middle class. This study suggests that international education was once largely exclusive to India's elite, but in recent decades the number of Indian people pursuing international education has expanded significantly (in line with global increases). In this sense, international education is 'trickling down' as a class project, and the international education industry also appears to be diversifying in order to accommodate the aspirations of middle-class and potentially lower-middle-class people. As individual aspirations and the industry grow, borders around the 'right kind' of international student mobility will be policed even more rigidly by the elite, and thus the risks and vulnerabilities of some groups will be greater. The vulnerabilities of suburban strivers indicate that those genuinely in the middle of India's population in terms of wealth will likely experience even greater risks given that they will have even less accumulated capital than the suburban strivers in this study. Understanding how international education is differentiated along class lines to reproduce privilege rather than to allow for socio-economic mobility will be crucial to future research in this area.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

In this chapter I have so far outlined the key contributions to knowledge that this research has made and the gaps that it has sought to address. However, there are some limitations to this study, which can be addressed in future research. For instance, this study was geographically restricted to Mumbai. Participants and other informants in India have suggested that these findings would be similarly applicable to other major Indian metropolises, especially Delhi (where the North and South divide potentially mirrors the South Mumbai/Suburbs binary in this study). It would, however, be interesting to know whether localised micro-categories of class are similarly potent in contexts in which international education is a more recent phenomenon, such as ‘tier two’ cities in India (Jaipur, Surat, Vadodara, etc.), and what impact/relevance class status has for students departing from these cities. What kind of access to information about international education do these students have? Do their schools prepare them to study abroad, and if so, how? What expectations and aspirations do these students attach to international education? Does international education factor into the negotiation of class boundaries in these localised contexts? What role does gender play in the transnational mobilities of young people? Does caste play a more significant or obvious role in the formation of class identities in other contexts? In a similar vein, these questions could be applied to other geographical and cultural contexts in the Global South in which international education has become an increasingly important component of youth transitions (Robertson, Harris & Baldassar, 2018b).

Asking these questions in different contexts, both within India and elsewhere, may not only reveal variations on the findings presented here, but also has the potential to paint a larger empirical picture about international student mobilities. Given the massive growth of international student mobility in recent decades (UNESCO, 2017), it seems likely that the popularity of spending time studying overseas as a young person from the Global South will continue to grow. It is also likely that, as the international education industry grows, this form of mobility will become desirable – and accessible – for people of more diverse class backgrounds. We already see the beginnings of this in the emergence of predominantly American universities opening campuses or engaging in joint ventures/degree programs with universities in Asia and the Middle East, which are aimed at local students who may not otherwise be able to afford a foreign degree (also

see Leung & Waters, 2013). India's current policies and laws do not allow foreign universities to open campuses in India, but there is much speculation about the imminent relaxation of these restrictions (Brown & Jeffrey, 2016; Mishra & Nanda, 2016; Hindustan Times, 2017), which would likely see an influx of foreign interest given the size and youth of India's population.

As the international education industry seems poised to continue to morph to meet growing demand, how class status relates to the acquisition of foreign qualifications will remain an important question. As Waters and Leung's (2013a, 2013b, 2017a, 2017b) work has importantly demonstrated in East Asia, different value is attached to where a degree is acquired, which can have flow-on effects on the professional success of a graduate. With a few exceptions, we know very little about how international education impacts the lives of young people as they move between being a student and a working 'adult' (Collins et al., 2017). Again, the lifecourse approach becomes important in raising questions such as: what does studying abroad mean as people progress through adulthood, what long-term value does it hold? Do those who obtain foreign degrees manage to convert this into long-term professional advantage, as the students in this study anticipated? Are the negative experiences of suburban strivers who return prematurely only temporary, or are there lasting impacts for those who do not accumulate the requisite amount of cosmopolitan cultural capital via international education? Do they end up regretting money spent on international education? This also opens-up questions relating to how localised micro-categories of class might relate to professional or business contexts. For instance, do (transnationally mobile) professionals experience localised micro-categories of class in a similar way to students, and what impact does this have?

Discussing India's IT industry and its middle-class workers, Carol Upadhyia (2016a) elucidates the value of asking questions such as those in the paragraph above. In her words: "To understand how work intersects with class, power, culture, and subjectivity, we need to attend to the valuation of work. By focusing on the lived experiences of actors and the role of social prestige in giving substance to class identity, we can trace how specific meanings come to be attributed to different kinds of work" (282). I concur with this approach, adding that it is also important to attend to the forms of education that lead into these privileged or 'valued' forms of work. Approaching the

study of class and privilege from a holistic perspective that considers these factors across an individual's lifespan would result in a body of research that allows us to understand how lifecourses – and the mobilities within individual lifecourses – are shaped by class status.

Addressing the relationship(s) between localised class status and transnational mobility also raises questions about how – in this instance – international education impacts an individual across their lifecourse, beyond their careers. In Chapter Eight I discussed how participants imagined that international education would relate to their marriages, but this was limited to unmarried young women, many of whom were yet to depart for overseas. Future research could investigate whether international education actually impacts the marriages of young women (and men) in the ways that they described in this study, from making for 'better' spouses, to allowing the diversion of expected timings of marriage, and so forth. Extending this focus on the domestic sphere, future research could also investigate if (and how) the more widespread attainment of foreign degrees today impacts educational decisions made for the next generation. Will parents with foreign degrees be more likely than those with local degrees to send their children abroad? What impact will this have on class boundaries? This also extends to the types of schools that are likely to develop in India (and other Asian contexts). It is probable that, in line with the growing demand for foreign degrees, more schools delivering international curricula (as discussed in Chapter Six) will emerge in areas where studying overseas is aspirational. What impact will this have on education in India? Will this heighten class divides, where *generations* of elite have access to privatised international education that the less elite cannot afford? Again, what will this mean for the local job market in the future?

Understanding the different ways that localised class status impacts the vulnerabilities and outcomes of international education for students and their families could also shape how the industry is regulated and information about studying abroad is conveyed – both in India and in other contexts. In a recent co-authored paper (Tuxen & Robertson, 2018), Shanthi Robertson and I made a series of policy recommendations, primarily in relation to the divided system of education agents and counsellors – which is also informed by the localised micro-categories of class discussed throughout this thesis.

First, any compliance frameworks developed in India must address divisions between various brokers, which also includes many other tiers of lower-level brokers outside Mumbai. This is important because counsellors are in a better position to bear the costs of compliance, whereas agents' reliance on commission may result in compliance costs being passed on to students, who are already likely to be in a more precarious financial position than those students accessing counsellors. Second, policy reform in receiving countries would likely target agents with contractual relationships with foreign institutions, which would overlook elite counsellors who operate autonomously of the commission system by demanding a fee-for-service from clients in the sending country. Third, the data have also suggested that non-elite students in particular have little knowledge of international education and tend to distrust online sources, resulting in potentially problematic reliance on agents for information. Perhaps the most pertinent policy strategy in India would be to educate prospective students and their families across different class strata, rather than seeking to regulate an industry that would likely prove expensive and difficult to achieve. State policy could, as Khadria et al. (2008) have suggested, focus on providing objective information on university rankings and student satisfaction to prospective international students. The findings presented in this study suggest that information about international education would be best circulated via trusted community networks and that focusing on high schools (particularly non-elite schools that do not routinely provide such information) would be a sensible beginning. These practical implications are, however, somewhat cursory, so future research could more closely consider the questions raised by these policy implications.

Writing this thesis has involved many incidental conversations with friends in Mumbai about the complexities of class in their city and their nation. In a recent chat, a friend (who I cite here with permission) explained to me: "In India, and especially in the cities, there are so many different levels of class. So you can't possibly say that 'the middle class do this' or 'the rich do that', because there are so many different types of rich people and there are, like, a million different middle classes. But at the same time, there are things that 90% of rich people do, and things that 90% of middle-class people want to do or try to do – and many times succeed in doing but at a greater strain." This casual conversation reflected much of what I have sought to work through in this thesis, in terms of highlighting the necessary complexity of studying class in India (which also



applies to other empirical contexts); understanding class as project of the reproduction of privilege and distinction; and attending to how specific and localised micro-categories of class reveal important nuances around broader social trends. While there are indeed many things people “want or try to do” to reproduce class privilege, in contemporary urban India, international education is a pivotal site for understanding how the local and the transnational come together to shape classed projects of the lifecourse. I hope this thesis can lead to further scholarly interventions in this space as the ‘foreign stamp’ continues to hold so much symbolic and economic power in the lives of Indian young people.



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## APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT SURVEY

SURVEY for Participants in *Desiring overseas education: accumulating capital in the 'new' Indian middle classes*

The following questions are intended to assist the researcher in understanding more about the participants' socio-economic position in the wider context of Mumbai society.

**Providing this information is voluntary. Please leave any questions you do not wish to answer blank.**

WHAT IS YOUR CASTE AND SUB-CASTE, IF ANY?

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WHAT RELIGION, IF ANY, DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH?

---

WHAT LANGUAGE/S DO YOU SPEAK AT HOME?

---

WHICH 'COMMUNITY', IF ANY, DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH? (e.g. Gujarati, Marwari, etc.)

---

WHAT IS YOUR ESTIMATED ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME?

- ☐ 5 or more crores
- ☐ 2-5 crores
- ☐ 1-2 crores
- ☐ 50 lakhs – 1 crore
- ☐ 20-50 lakhs
- ☐ 10-20 lakhs
- ☐ 5-10 lakhs

HOW WILL/WAS YOUR OVERSEAS STUDY BE FINANCED?

---

WHAT IS YOUR FATHER'S OCCUPATION?

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## APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

### FOR DEPARTING STUDENTS:

#### Warm up questions

- What type of education are you seeking overseas? Why have you chosen this?
- Which institution/s are you applying to? Why have you chosen these in particular?
- What subject/area do you plan to study? (*Arts, science, med, hairdressing, cookery, etc.*)
- Which country is your first choice? Why? Do you have a second and/or third choice?
- Are you nervous about going overseas? (No, what is it that reassures you? Yes, what are you nervous about exactly and why?)
- Have you travelled overseas before? If yes, have you been to the place (country, city) you're planning to study at?

#### Agent role

- Why have you chosen to use an agent?
- Are you seeking advice from anyone else?
- What things did you need help with in preparing to study abroad?

#### Family/friends role

- What role do you think your family plays in influencing your decisions to study?
- Do any/many of your family members have a tertiary education? How many of these have an overseas education?
- Have/are many of your friends gone/going abroad to study? If yes, what influence do you think this has on your decisions?
- Do you think it's 'flashy' somehow that you're studying abroad? i.e. are people going to talk about the fact that you're studying abroad?

#### Gendered/age expectations

- Do you think that it's different for boys and girls when going overseas? (*i.e. do boys have different opportunities to girls? Do boys have more freedom?*)
- How different do you think your experience would be if you were a boy/girl?
- Do you think it's important to be young when you go overseas to study? Why/why not?
- Do you fall into the 'reserved seats' or 'open category' when it comes to university entrance? Did this have any part in your decision to study abroad?

#### Value of overseas education (= aspirations, expectations, imaginary)

- What do you think is the value of obtaining an overseas education?
- Do you think that people use overseas education as a pathway to other things? (*i.e. marriage, migration, language, remittances, etc.*)
- Probe: What do you hope to get out of your study abroad, other than an education?
- How do you imagine life overseas? (*i.e. what does your day-to-day look like?*)
- Do you expect to work overseas? If yes, what kind of job do you think you'll get? What are the benefits of working overseas?

Risk (= safety, financial, honour, etc.)

- Do you think there are any risks in going overseas to study? If yes, what are the risks? \*risks do not have to be negative\*
- Do you think the risks would be different if you were a boy/girl?

Future Plans

- What are your plans for the future? How does your education fit into this?
- When do you see yourself getting married?

Defining the Indian Middle Class

- How do you know that someone belongs to the middle class?
- How do you define 'middle class' in the Indian context?
- How do you think studying abroad fits in to middle-class status/dreams/aspirations?
- Other than education, why is it good to go overseas to study? Is it better than studying in India?

*Closing remark: Thank you very much for your inputs. Is there anything else that you think I should have asked you? Are there any important things that I have missed?*



## APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

### Participant Information Sheet

(Education Counsellors)

#### Researcher:

My name is Nonie Tuxen, I am a PhD student at the Australian National University in Canberra. As a postgraduate student, I am based in the College of Arts and Social Sciences; within the College I am located in the School of Archaeology and Anthropology.

**Project Title:** Desiring overseas education: accumulating capital in the ‘new’ Indian middle classes

#### General Outline of the Project:

This research seeks to explore the desire for overseas education among the middle classes in Mumbai, India. **The overarching research objective is to identify the value of obtaining tertiary education overseas, as well as the role that education agents/counsellors and families play in the process of pursuing an overseas education.**

Education agents/counsellors, students seeking their services, the families of these students, and individuals who have previously studied abroad will be invited to participate in the study.

The data collected in this interview may be presented in my PhD thesis, journal articles, presentations, and a book. It may also be used in future research. The data collected will be used as evidence of key insights and experiences relevant to the study. **Individual participants will remain non-identifiable in the publication of this research.** If participants wish to receive a summary of the research after it is completed, please check the appropriate box on the consent form and write your email address on the consent form.

#### Participant Involvement:

**Agents/counsellors will be interviewed with the purpose of gaining personal insights from someone with a professional background in international education. Agents/counsellors are not viewed as formal representatives of their organisation.**

This study will provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on the migratory processes that they are presently involved in. **Participants will be required to partake in an interview lasting no more than 60 minutes.** The gender of participants will also be noted by the researcher in the course of the interview.

**With your permission only, these interviews will be audio recorded.** You have the option **not** to have your voice recorded if you wish. Interviews can take place in public spaces (such as a restaurant), offices or in the family home.

**Participation in this research is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any point prior to publication of the research** with no penalty or disadvantage to themselves. You do not need to provide an explanation for your withdrawal. **You have the option to decline to answer questions at any time.** No incentives will be provided to participants. If participants choose to withdraw from the project the relevant notes and contributions from the research will be destroyed as appropriate. This includes the deletion of all digital material and shredding of any hard copy research notes.

During the course of the interview, the researcher may request personal demographic information (such as caste, household income, etc.) in the form of a written survey. This information may be summarised in the research in aggregate form or used to situate comments made by participants. Participants are not required to answer these questions, or any other questions with which they are uncomfortable or do not wish to respond to. Participants do not need to provide an explanation for not answering a question during the interview or survey. Following the interview, the responses will be synthesised and analysed by the researcher.

### **Confidentiality:**

Confidentiality will be protected as far as the law allows. In the project, specific steps will be taken to maintain the confidentiality of participants throughout the research process. Only the researcher and the ANU Research Supervisor will have access to the material provided by participants. Individual participants and organisations alike will remain non-identifiable in the publication of this research. Participant contributions to the research will be attributed through the use of pseudonyms or the type of participant (agent/student/family member) and their gender (where relevant). If participants are not satisfied with either of these options, the interview will not proceed. In publication of the research, direct quotes will be used.

To preserve participants' confidentiality, all data will be kept securely stored. During the research, all notes and data will be stored in a secure location in India, and then in a locked filing cabinet at the ANU upon the researcher's return to Australia. All digital files (including audio recordings) will be stored on a password-protected computer. The data collected will be stored for 5 years as a CD after the research is published in order to comply with ANU Guidelines.

### **Queries and Concerns:**

If you have any queries regarding this research, please contact:

Ms Nonie Tuxen  
Primary investigator, ANU  
Email: [nonie.tuxen@anu.edu.au](mailto:nonie.tuxen@anu.edu.au)

Dr Margaret Kiley  
Research supervisor, ANU  
Email: [margaret.kiley@anu.edu.au](mailto:margaret.kiley@anu.edu.au)

If you have any queries after December 2015 (i.e. in the year 2016 onwards) and wish to speak to someone located in Mumbai, please contact:

Prof. Padma Valeskar  
Fieldwork Supervisor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences  
Email: [velaskar@tiss.edu](mailto:velaskar@tiss.edu)

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about how this research has been conducted, please contact:

Ethics Manager  
The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee  
The Australian National University  
Telephone: +61 2 6125 3427  
Email: [Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au](mailto:Human.Ethics.Officer@anu.edu.au)

## APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

WRITTEN CONSENT for Participants in *Desiring overseas education: accumulating capital in the 'new' Indian middle classes*

I have read and understood the Information sheet you have given me about the research project and I agree to participate in the project.

Signature:.....

I agree to this interview being audio taped

YES ☐ NO ☐

I agree to be identified in **one or more** of the following ways

Pseudonym (fake name – I am not allowed to use your real name)

YES ☐ NO ☐

Participant type (i.e. agent, student, family member) and Gender (where relevant)

YES ☐ NO ☐

Signature:.....

I wish to receive the outcomes of the study via email

YES ☐ NO ☐

If yes, please write your email address here:

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## APPENDIX E: ETHICS APPROVAL

Sent: Monday, 1 September 2014 1:05 PM  
To: Nonie Tuxen  
Cc: Human.Ethics.Officer; Debjani Ganguly  
Subject: Human Ethics Protocol 2014/383

THIS IS A SYSTEM-GENERATED E-MAIL. PLEASE DO NOT REPLY. SEE BELOW FOR E-MAIL CONTACT DETAILS.

Dear Ms Nonie Tuxen,

Protocol: 2014/383

Desiring overseas education: accumulating capital in the 'new' Indian middle classes

**I am pleased to advise you that your Human Ethics application received approval by the Chair of the Humanities & Social Sciences DERC on 01/09/2014.**

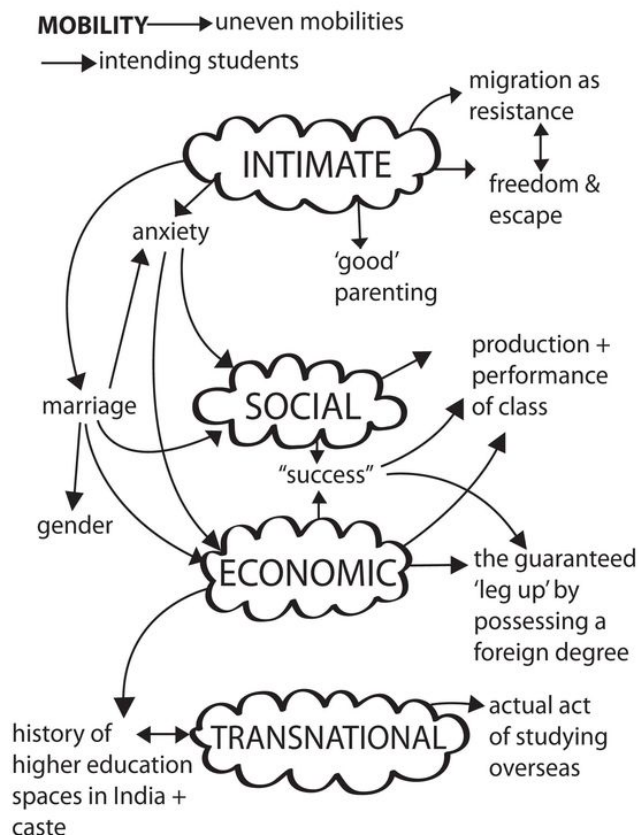
For your information:

1. Under the NHMRC/AVCC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research we are required to follow up research that we have approved. Once a year (or sooner for short projects) we shall request a brief report on any ethical issues which may have arisen during your research or whether it proceeded according to the plan outlined in the above protocol.
2. Please notify the committee of any changes to your protocol in the course of your research, and when you complete or cease working on the project.
3. Please notify the Committee immediately if any unforeseen events occur that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the research work.
4. Please advise the HREC if you receive any complaints about the research work.
5. The validity of the current approval is five years' maximum from the date shown approved. For longer projects you are required to seek renewed approval from the Committee.



## APPENDIX F: MEMO WRITING

An important element of grounded theory is memo-writing, in which the researcher maintains a written record of how categories, concepts, themes and theory emerged from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Memos reflect the ‘mental dialogue’ occurring between myself and the data during the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 169). Memos can take virtually any form, as long as they are dated and notes are made that indicate which segment of the data they were inspired by (Charmaz, 2006). Memos were especially important during the present research because of the sheer volume of data produced by the interviews, and the complexity of the coding process. As Figure 4 in Chapter Three illustrates, a single response from a participant would often fall into more than one category, so maintaining memos that allowed me to trace the development of the concepts and categories was crucial in identifying conceptual saturation and in the development of theory, as well as in the drafting of the final thesis. Below is an example of how I used memos to tease out internal dialogues during the research process. This memo is also an example of axial coding around the concept of mobility.



Example memo, dated 10/03/2016





## APPENDIX G: HOUSEHOLD INCOME ESTIMATED BY PARTICIPANTS

ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLD INCOME REPORTED BY PROSPECTIVE STUDENT PARTICIPANTS		
PSEUDONYM	CLASS GROUP	INCOME
Jason D'Costa	SS	N/A
Neha Srinivasan	SS	20-50 lakhs
Ranya Shetty	SOBO	50 lakhs - 2 crores (guess)
Shriya Naidu	SS	20-50 lakhs
Bapu Bhosale	SS	Less than 5 Lakhs (father is not working, sister's income from NZ supports the family in India)
Nidhi Metha	SOBO	1-2 crores (guess)
Urvashi Singh	SS	10-20 lakhs (guess)
Gurpinder Singh	SS	N/A
Zeenia Wadia	SOBO	1-2 crores (guess)
Kriti Bafna	SOBO	Unknown (refused on that basis)
Purvi Kampani	SS	20-50 lakhs (guess)
Rohit Talwarkar	SS	10-20 lakhs
Mohinder Singh	SOBO	50 lakhs-1 crore
Naina Apte	SOBO	Refused
Rustom Contractor	SOBO	40+ lakhs (guess)
Jignesh Shah	SS	5-10 lakhs (guess)
Ashish Padiwal	SS	20-50 lakhs (guess)
Harsh Nayar	SOBO	10-20 lakhs
Swapnali Bedar	SS	20-50 lakhs (guess)
Abhimanyu Agarwal	SS	5-10 lakhs
Balwinder Saini	SS	10-20 lakhs
Harbajan Khalsa	SS	10-20 lakhs
Harshil Shah	SS	5-10 lakhs
Krupa Kapadia	SS	5-10 lakhs
Aalika Peres	SS	5-10 lakhs
Sumit Vora	SOBO	50 lakhs-1 crore

ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLD INCOME REPORTED BY RETURNED STUDENT PARTICIPANTS		
PSEUDONYM	CLASS GROUP	INCOME
Richa Shah	SS	20-50 lakhs
Simrat Kaur	SS	Unknown
Divyak D'Souza	SS	1-2 Crores (household)
Umang Manot	SOBO	2-5 Crores
Geeta Jhuremalani	SOBO	2-5 crores (guess)
Navita Joshi	SS	20-50 lakhs
Sahil Shah	SOBO	50 lakhs - 1 crore (guess)
Mohit Tahiliani	SOBO	1-2 (guess)
Tushar Bhadare	SOBO	Unknown (refused on that basis)
Zaid Arfan	SS	20-50 lakhs
Antara Jaisinghani	SS	Unknown (refused on that basis)
Disha Chawla	SS	50 lakhs - 1 crore
Kunaal Mody	SOBO	N/A
Nimit Moodley	SOBO	50 lakhs - 1 crore (guess)
Vidya Jain	SOBO	N/A
Anirudh Kapur	SOBO	20-50 lakhs
Mansi Kothari	SS	50 lakhs - 1 crore (guess)
Jigisha Patel	SS	50 lakhs - 1 crore
Anupama Metha	SOBO	2-5 Crores
Piyush Gambani	SOBO	1-2 Crores